



**MINUTES**  
**SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION**  
**Washington County School District**  
**121 West Tabernacle, St. George, Utah**  
**February 26, 2024**  
**5:15 p.m.**

*Present: Board President Becky Dunn, Board Member Craig Seegmiller, Board Vice President David Stirland, Board Member LaRene Cox, Board Member Burke Staheli, Board Member Nannette Simmons, Superintendent Richard Holmes, Business Administrator Brent Bills, Assistant Superintendent Nate Esplin, Assistant Superintendent Cheri Stevenson, Executive HR Director Darin Thomas, Executive Director Amy Mitchell, Executive Director Steve Gregoire, Communications Director Steven Dunham, and Technology Director Jeremy Cox. Board Member Terry Hutchinson participated via phone for part of the meeting.*

*Minutes: Executive Secretary Kajsia Boyer*

**Reverence by Member Seegmiller.**

**Pledge of Allegiance by Member Simmons.**

**NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING – 2024-2025 SCHOOL SPEND PLANS AND SCHOOL FEE SCHEDULE**

**The Washington County School District will hold a Public Hearing on February 26, 2024 at 5:15 p.m. to receive public comments on the proposed 2024-2025 School Spend Plans and School Fee Schedule.**

Brent Bills explained that we are required to approve the spend plans and fee schedule each year. We do have some change year-over-year. He reviewed the changes for the upcoming year including fee name change to Business/Marketing, fee changes to Drivers Education for a retest fee of \$40 and a fee addition for additional driving hours at \$35 per hour, an increase to the Individual Life Skills course from \$40 to \$60, a Marching Band uniform cleaning fee of \$25, and an increase from \$250 to \$260 for Executive Council apparel. He mentioned that with extracurricular fees there have been schools that were charging the \$350 for camps and trips and also charging for hotel rooms and meals. The proposed fee increase would be to \$550 with a wording change that hotel and meal cost are included in the \$550 fee for camps and trips. Hotels and trip meals may be charged for regular and post season play only. Co-curricular clubs don't necessarily have a defined season so they have an approved fee of \$350 for camps and trips but can still charge for hotel rooms and meals all year long. Burke Staheli asked if there is a cap. Brent Bills said the hotel cap is \$35 night. There is no cap on the number of them and they can run the meals separately. There has also been changes made to some of the participation fees for the more expensive sports to cover costs of referees and line judges. Those costs have gone way up. A fee for the new sport Lacrosse was added. Uniform rental fees were added for Lacrosse and Wrestling. We did not know that any of the schools were doing rentals for Wrestling uniforms. There was also a \$50 fee added to help refurbish football helmets. The helmets have to be evaluated every year and have certain refurbishing requirements that has to be done. If they don't hit a certain benchmark they have to completely go through and redo the helmet interior or get a brand-new helmet. This is due to concussion protocols. The fee for the American Sign Language FAI Test was increased to \$75 and the cost for Foreign Student tuition was increased to \$9,140. Brent Bills mentioned that one other request was received from an intermediate school to increase the CCA fee (FACs) from \$5 to \$10. It would also need to be changed on

the spend plan. Burke Staheli asked about students who do not qualify to apply for a fee waiver but cannot pay. Brent Bills said if they cannot apply for fee waiver, the principal can grant them a partial fee waiver, or the student can be given opportunities to do some fundraising that would go toward their individual fees. Brent Bills also mentioned HB415 School Fees Amendment. If the bill passes the District would need to redo the schedule next month. The bill would not allow fee charges for many of the instructional supplies. It is anticipated that there would be some one-time funds if the bill passes. David Stirland said looking at the numbers on the fee schedule, he is not sure how a family with a student, or two, could play multiple sports. Brent Bills said that is why we have the not to exceed total of \$5,000 per student that includes fundraising. He said that every school in our District has at least 5% of their student body under fee waivers. He explained how the District has tried to even the playing field for schools across the district by the District covering the costs above 5% of the student body on fee waivers. The amount is tracked over the school year and is usually paid back to the school in June. He shared an example saying if a school has 1000 students, then the school covers the first 50 kids worth of fee waivers then the District will reimburse funds for any additional fee waivers. As we add an amount to the fee schedule, then we know that we're going to have to pick up part of those fees.

### **Public Hearing:**

**Malynn Cutler** shared that she grew up in a very musical home here in St. George. Her parents were huge advocates for the arts in this community. She feels she her life has been full because of music and has done much to add music to the lives of her four children. She shared that her children all play at least one instrument in addition to piano. They have participated in orchestra, band, and choir classes, and regional and state solo ensemble, and have received scholarships to continue their college education. She shared that three of her four children had the opportunity to participate in the Disneyland music trips over the past five years. She said she had the memorable opportunity of chaperoning the trip with her two oldest kids. They loved the unique opportunity to have a workshop and play in the orchestra while recording with a movie clip. She feels that every high school music student should have a meaningful experience like this. She is hoping to be able to chaperone the trip next year when her youngest daughter goes. She feels that students from multiple schools in the District will be negatively affected by the \$350 cap on Fine Arts trips. The Disneyland trip and workshop will be nearly impossible with the limit and will shift the burden from parents to teachers for additional fundraising. Our music teachers in the District are some of the best at doing more with less, but these additional limitations will have negative impacts and limited opportunities for our students. She shared some of the fees other school districts in northern Utah charge for Fine Arts. She feels our District's fees are very low which limits opportunities that music teachers in our District are able to give the students. She talked to a choir teacher in the District and was told that a \$600-\$800 fee cap would be sufficient to provide these amazing opportunities for our students. She said if an increase to that suggested cap is not possible, she asked that the Board at least raise the cap to \$550 to match the athletics and be consistent in not treating athletes better than music students. She also suggested including a sentence that would allow each music student the opportunity to go on a Disney trip at least once every three years.

**Chris Beykirch** has had children at Desert Hills High School in the arts program and also participating in sports program. He said we have such amazing teachers in the music program that help to retain and recruit additional students. He said he was shocked to see the sports all moved to \$550 while music was at \$350. He feels there is a huge inequality and almost discrimination against arts. He said there are already teachers that are working at three different schools just to be a music teacher. They are amazing and do an incredible job. They have inspired his children. He understands that the purpose of the fees is to shift the burden to parents. He feels that burden is back on the teachers if you leave the fee at \$350 for musical experiences. He said the opportunities for his daughter or son is eliminated because now there's \$350 for five state events that require travel to Salt Lake City. He feels it is not fair and is not right when school is cancelled and the entire population of students is taken to a football stadium for a game. He also mentioned that the current principal request shows \$800 as an applicable fee for any musical or out-of-state event. There is disparity between the numbers they are seeing today. He is in full support of arts and full support of sports. He is in full support of equality and said they both have a place.

**Nathan Mathews** shared his perspective as a high school senior on the efficacy of trips. He had the opportunity to go on the California trip with the orchestra his sophomore year. He said there is a very clear distinction between the class he is in and the sense of community and engagement within that arts class than he sees in the other classes that were not involved in the trip. The trip was a great opportunity for all the students in the program to not only meet new people but also strengthen the levels of connections in the program. That will have far reaching effects in the future by fostering a sense of community and encouraging future engagement. He feels the trip was just overall really helpful and useful.

**Tiffany Gunnerson** said she is the mom of five kids in the District right now from high school to preschool. She volunteers at every school except the preschool. She is involved with PTA and serves on the Music Board at Desert Hills High. She is a football mom and on the Fundraising Booster Club for football. She shared that music fundraising is hard. She asked the Board to please increase the out-of-state fee for parents. She said when she talks to parents about fundraising, they just want to pay the fee. They don't want emails and don't want to talk about selling things, they just want to pay the fee. She said our teachers are amazing and if there are students that need help with the fee, they are going to move heaven and earth to get that child on the trip and she would do the same. She has spent time in every music class this year trying to make announcement and the music teachers deserve haloes. They are amazing teachers, and she can't believe what they are able to accomplish with what they have. She also did some research on what other school districts are charging for out-of-state fees and found the average to be \$1,674. She said these trips don't happen every year which is why then can be a little more expensive. She feels it is not like football with a camp every summer that adds up very quickly. She feels this is a much more manageable one-time thing students can look forward to. She said her children are all looking forward to their trips and they would be devastated if this became unworkable. Our teachers here are well known throughout the state and are known by name. She feels we need to keep them and need to support them. She said it is not often that a parent comes to the School District and begs to up a fee. She does not want to put the burden on the teachers. There are things students can do to earn money so they can make the trip.

**Caleb Gunnerson** is a senior at Desert Hills High School in the orchestra. He emphasized how important these trips are to students in the Fine Arts. He feels these trips are vital to successful schools and they allow the students to connect in ways that are not possible in a classroom setting. He said he has been able to get closer with his friends and make new friends that he would not have otherwise. The school trips given them a chance to just hang out, have fun, and do things that are awesome. He mentioned that they have been able to do lots of cool things on some of their trips such as seeing how instruments they play are created at a music shop, tour music buildings, visit and perform in music venues and other cool places, and watch other orchestras and other different music groups perform. He said this has inspired him personally to be a better musician and to stick with the music program. He feels these experiences are not possible outside of these trips and they create memories and help students be more dedicated to their art. It really motivates you when you get to see these other people play and when you get to play in these cool places. I know that every year I try and work hard, and I know my fellow students work hard so we can try to qualify for state orchestra and be able to compete and see others perform as well. These trips are really good motivation and just solidify them as musicians and in building friendships.

**Carsen Cooper** is a student at Desert Hills High. He thanked the Board for doing a really good job. He said he keeps in touch with what is going on around the country and is proud of our District. He said he knows that the Board isn't making a change and taking anything away from them, but he is also aware that the price of everything is going up. He feels if we don't increase the fees it will mean with the cost, they will eventually become too expensive, and they won't be able to do what they have done in the past. He assumes that is probably why the sport programs also wanted to increase what they are able to charge for fees. He feels these trips really do create opportunities for team building and camaraderie. He shared that his family is not a musical family. He said of all his classes and activities, music is by far the most cohesive. These programs are vital. He feels the Board represents a demographic that feel music is important, probably more so than other places. He feels it is important to consider who is being

represented and also the fact that sports programs as well as music programs are equally important to the people you represent. He feels the community deserves a bit of credit and feels if the fees are raised, it will be fine they will do the fundraising that necessary to get the job done.

**Donna Graf**, secretary from Desert Hills High School, said she helps as an accounts receivable finance secretary. She also helps with the school spend plans. She said in 2022 it was the first year that she was working at the school, and they had their Fine Arts Disneyland trip. Between orchestra, band, choir, theater, and dance there were 216 students what went on that trip. They had three nights of hotel charges. She said with the \$350 fee and adding three nights it would come to \$455. She said that typically the trip would cost \$600 to \$650 which leaves a deficit of \$145 per student. Taking that deficit amount times the number of students comes to \$31,000 that the Fine Arts programs would need to raise for the trip. She mentioned that the cheer team did a large fundraiser this year and was able to raise \$24,000. She feels Fine Arts would not be able to generate that type of following. She said there were a couple of things as her spend plans were looked at and asked about hotels for All-state trips. Brent Bills said that is the difference between extracurricular and co-curricular clubs. Extracurricular cannot charge, but co-curricular can charge for hotels.

**Raeghan Bangerter**, Dixie High, said she would like to advocate for the agricultural program in our county. She feels with the \$350 cap on trips it would not allow students to get the full experience that the FFA Club provides. She personally was able to learn a lot from a California trip she attended, but also from the National Stock Show in Colorado that was very informative. She was able to go to many booths and look at different aspects of agriculture. She is planning to major in agricultural business and would not be here if it wasn't for the FFA and the funding that provided. She asked that the Board not forget the FFA and other clubs who go and do these wonderful things. She said a lot of her friends joined for the trips. Because of the trip they learned so much more and were able to get the full benefit of everything provided. They not only loved the trip and loved the whole experience. She has noticed that in St. George specifically agriculture is declining, and we are getting a lot of houses. She feels it is super important that we continue to advocate for agriculture programs and provide the necessary funding for them.

**JuLynn Coombs** said she also has children at Desert Hills High. Two have been involved in the choir program and one was on the drill team. She said the drill team can pull money in and have a lot of opportunities to bring in the money they need to run their very expensive program. She is also heavily involved in the booster club for the choir, and they struggle to fundraise. She feels that the \$350 cap seems extremely low. The choir program is a year-long program. They start in April and go until the next April. It's ongoing and is never ending like other programs. Sports are usually a season. She asked the Board that at least the same amount be allocated if not more for a program that is all year long.

**Niky Wallin** shared a text from a student who shared their experience in the music program. She said the student just wants to be recognized as an equal with the sports teams and not have the cap so low that it places a burden to fundraise. She said she also has children at different schools that are heavily involved in the Fine Arts. Both are musicians and play multiple instruments. She said she would much rather pay a fee than fundraise. They would rather have that time to practice instruments. The music programs matter, and they are educational. They inspire and she said she could not say enough about the good these music teachers do.

The high school music teachers present mentioned they plan to do the trip to Disneyland every three years to allow every student to have the experience.

Brent Bills took a minute to respond to some of the misunderstandings with the fees. He said FFA clubs are curricular clubs and can qualify for state and national trips. The costs, except meals, are paid for those qualifying. The fees are not going to change what is happening there. He also mentioned parents take the child for National Stock Shows. He explained that the fee schedule was made to treat sports and Fine Arts equally. The amount of travel the Fine Arts does for All-state or other state trips are different types

of trips and hotel rooms and meals can be charged. They are not included in the \$350 fee and are okay. If the amount was raised to \$550 and included the hotel and meal charges like the extracurricular sports, it would actually make it worse for Fine Arts. There is not a regular season or post season for your trips like extracurricular. The way the schedule works actually gives Fine Arts more flexibility. Burke Staheli said he feels that parents would rather have a solid number that is higher. Brent Bills said giving them a solid number would hurt their program. Becky Dunn asked if the money could roll from year-to-year to accrue for the Disneyland Trip. Superintendent Richard Holmes said they just need to include it in their spend plan to roll it over. Brent Bills said they can't charge more for student A than for student B, but money can be collected over three years to pay for a student's trip. Becky Dunn suggested those with additional questions reach out the Brent Bills.

## **WORK SESSION**

The Board briefly discussed the concerns expressed in the public hearing. Brent Bills said it was explained to the school. There are also students that don't go on the trips. Rob Schmidt said once they go to the events that are part of the regular program, they can't afford to do the extra trips. Brent Bills said they are allowed to have students pay for the hotel and meals. They can also charge for All-state. Superintendent Holmes said it would help to clarify if they show where they are short. They can break the costs down to show what is used from the \$350.00. He needs to see what they are doing. Rob Schmidt feels he needs to understand better how the funds can be rolled over. Brent Bills said we have spend plans and books that show \$150 being put aside each year for the trip. Becky Dunn suggested Brent meet with the schools to understand what they need. Brent Bills said they are the only school wanting it raised. Most of the other schools have said their parents could not afford it. Becky Dunn also shared concern with schools following Policy as it only allows one out-of-state trip. Several board members are concerned about families that cannot afford it. Brent Bills and Rob Schmidt will meet with the school and send an email update. Brent Bills said we could also send out a questionnaire to all schools to see if they would rather charge hotels and meals separate or have them all together. The intent of not doing that what to help them, not hurt them.

## **Board PLC Training – Steve Gregoire**

Steve Gregoire shared what we do when the kids struggle and don't get it. He shared a video of the reading interventions happening at Riverside Elementary. The video shared about their HAWK Time. It gives kids the individual help they need. It also gives teachers the data, which helps with how they teach in the classroom. Students gain confidence in reading. The 95% program helps the kids focus and helps to see where they need help. They identify skill-by-skill and kid-by-kid to see what is needed. Steve Gregoire said there are 27 other schools that are doing similar things. They also work skill-by-skill and kid-by-kid to help students.

## **Water Conservancy Board – Superintendent Richard Holmes**

Superintendent Richard Holmes said they are meeting on Thursday with Zach Renstrom at the Water Conservancy District. He reported that they did meet with the Washington County Commissioners. They didn't say no to having a board member on the Water Conservancy Board, but it was a sensitive subject. They have tried not to make it political and have the seat continue with the position. They are also concerned about the size of the Board becoming too large. They do understand the request with WCSD being one of the largest water users. LaRene Cox also let them know that we are starting a water company in Hildale, so they suggested meeting with Zach Renstrom.

## **Legislative Update – Superintendent Richard Holmes and Brent Bills**

Richard Holmes reported on legislative session. He said that \$100,000,000 was put in the safety bill. He suggested that it will pass, and the funding will help. It will include items like security glass, cameras, and locks. Brent Bills said they are still waiting for the amendment to be completed. The school fees bill has \$35,000,000 for school fees and \$40,000,000 was allocated for vouchers. The Districts will receive 5% on the WPU. It was mentioned that \$50,000,000 was earmarked for merit pay. It is based on evaluations from the principal. The evaluations can be so subjective. Brent Bills said it will require a lot of reporting on the kind of school, grade level, gain scores, etc. Superintendent Richard Holmes said we don't know if it will

be divided equally among the districts. Brent Bills said we will need a mechanism for reporting teachers that don't have gain scores. Utah State will be doing the evaluation, and we will need a tool by December. He is still unsure about some of the timelines. There is \$4.8 million for the teacher retention bill. Brent Bills said we will need to provide post-partum leave for employees that won't count toward their sick time. Dave Stirland mentioned talking with a legislator about NESS funding. He was told it was taken care of. Superintendent Richard Holmes said it was not funded for this year. It will come back next year. Brent bills said the business administrators would like to start working right away on a formula that will work for everyone. They currently threw out small schools. There are some small arguments for small districts, but they also need to look at schools of scale. Brent Bills reported on a couple of concerning bills including HB173 and HB460. HB460 allows that employees with strongly held belief can choose not to do a job. He is concerned it could be a lawsuit waiting to happen. SB286 and SB186 would allow the city to do a tax increment payment for affordable housing. The city only has impact fees and should be giving up some of the impact fees. Brent Bills suggested talking with legislators.

Becky Dunn mentioned SJR10. She said they are meeting on March 1<sup>st</sup> to remove the education earmark out of funding. Money is tighter. She said there are six items that include fund public education beyond inflation (and so they're moving that to the 5% so they're doing that one), increase emphasis on local control and flexibility for boards, decreased administrative demands, elimination of unfunded mandates, automatic inflationary adjustment to the certified tax rate, and last, commitment to items of importance to the public ed community. Becky Dunn said JLC will take a vote on Friday, March 1<sup>st</sup>. She needs to know how everyone stands. Brent Bills mentioned the vote was scheduled for March 4<sup>th</sup> and was wondering how leadership voted to change it from March 4<sup>th</sup> to March 1<sup>st</sup>.

The bill says they have to pay for inflation and growth. After that they can spend any increase however they want. If SJR10 passes, the understanding is they have money set aside to increase and raise the sales tax on food. Superintendent Richard Holmes said there is concern with what parents are hearing. He is concerned that opposing it would do more harm than good for public education. David Stirland said the Board is elected officials and should have a voice. He wonders if we need to take a stand. LaRene Cox is concerned about removing from the Constitution money for the public schools. Can we trust it in the future? The constitution is guaranteed. Brent Bills explained the funding graph with the amendment G. We are better off in a down year, but in a good year, we received than we would have. He feels that if we oppose and lose, we will only get the limited amount, but if we win, we may have a better offer. The Board members present all shared their opposition for SJR10.

#### **Calendar Items – Superintendent Richard Holmes**

Superintendent Richard Holmes shared the Board calendar items coming up. Legacy Elementary will also be performing at Tuacahn on March 4<sup>th</sup>. It was mentioned that a 2<sup>nd</sup> Board Meeting will be held on March 25<sup>th</sup> at 5:15 p.m. April's Board Meeting will be on April 2<sup>nd</sup>.

**Board Member Stirland presented a motion to go into a closed session at 7:34 p.m. Board Member Simmons seconded the motion that passed unanimously.**

*Present: Board President Becky Dunn, Board Member Craig Seegmiller, Board Vice President David Stirland, Board Member LaRene Cox, Board Member Burke Staheli, Board Member Nannette Simmons, Superintendent Richard Holmes, Business Administrator Brent Bills, Assistant Superintendent Nate Esplin, Assistant Superintendent Cheri Stevenson, Executive HR Director Darin Thomas, Executive Director Amy Mitchell, Executive Director Steve Gregoire, Communications Director Steven Dunham, Technology Director Jeremy Cox, and Executive Secretary Kajsia Boyer.*

#### **CLOSED SESSION**

##### **Personnel Items**

**Board Member Seegmiller presented a motion to go out of the closed session at 7:52 p.m. Board Member Cox seconded the motion that passed unanimously.**

## **ACTION ITEMS**

### **Personnel Selections**

Becky Dunn said the recommendation would be to appoint Brandon Yost as the principal at Fossil Ridge Intermediate school.

**Board Member Seegmiller presented a motion to approve to selection of Brandon Yost for the principal of Fossil Ridge Intermediate School. Board Member Stirland seconded the motion that passed unanimously.**

**Board Member Staheli presented a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:53 p.m. Board Member Cox seconded the motion that passed unanimously.**

## **ADJOURNMENT**