A Workshop Meeting, with the East Bridgewater School Committee, was held on Thursday, April 16, 2015 at 6:30 PM in the Dr. Judith A. Riordan Performing Arts Center in the East Bridgewater Jr/Sr High School. In attendance were Chair Jennifer Kitchenham, Co-Chair Gordon McKinnon, Secretary Ellen Pennington, Keith Boyle, Theresa Maltz, Aimee McAlpine, and Recording Clerk Joanne Benner.

Also in attendance were: Elizabeth Legault, Principals Gentile, Vieira, and Williams, Director of Pupil Personnel Marie Grable, Board of Selectman Bill Dowling, Finance Committee John Margie, Virginia McCarthy, Kathi Nickandros, IT Director Rob King, Barbara Polese, teachers, and community members.

Mrs. Kitchenham said that Town Meeting is being extended to June 1, 2015. This will allow the School Committee additional time to prepare the budget. She asked that those in attendance listen to the presentation and email the Committee with any questions they may have. The public budget presentation will be on May 7, 2015 at 6:30 in the Riordan Performing Arts Center. Mrs. Kitchenham welcomed Elizabeth Legault and thanked her for volunteering her time tonight.

Mrs. Kitchenham opened the meeting at 6:35 PM.

WORKSHOP:

- A joint discussion was held with the Board of Selectman, Finance Committee, School Administration, and East Bridgewater Education Association to best address the schools need and the cuts that will be made for the FY16 school year.

The discussion opened with Mrs. Williams referencing the FY16 Projected Budget of $17,648,000 and the need to work within this budget as directed. She explained that we are in a deficit now because expense accounts were not properly funded. To work within the constraints we will need to reduce $12,000,000 in staffing.

Mrs. Lee, Interim Business Manager has reviewed every line item scrutinizing what needs to be budgeted so they are not underfunded. These lines have been appropriated with projected funding needs. Mrs. Kitchenham appreciates seeing the budget broken down by line item. Also, she shared that Mr. Samia will fund the line item for transportation as has been done in the past.

Mrs. William said the administrative team worked collaboratively and discussed every position in the district. Basically they started from the beginning and each spoke about their building needs. Although the cuts are devastating they came to a consensus that their primary responsibility is to maintain academic programming. The staff reductions at the Central School will greatly impact students and staff. Without lead teacher’s communication and planning will suffer, reducing a teacher will increase class size and they will no longer have specials.
Mr. Gentile, GWMMS Principal said the recommended cuts are catastrophic. The special programming at the Middle School will be eliminated and they will no longer be able to provide children with a comprehensive education. There will be no oversight or organization in the library and as a result of not having specials the school day will need to be shortened. This would impact the time and learning requirements mandated by the DOE and we could lose accreditation.

Mr. Paul Vieira, Jr/Sr High School Principal said the cuts in his building will be equally devastating. Currently students take seven classes and it will be reduced to five. Tech Ed, music, art, guidance, and business will be eliminated. Students need 110 credits to graduate and now would only get to 100 credits. Mrs. Nickandros pointed out that colleges look at not only the academic courses students take but also their comprehensive and well-rounded educations. We will lose more students to South Easton as a result of Tech Ed being eliminated. The question was raised would it cost more to fund these students attending South Easton than to keep the program in place.

Mr. Margie feels it would be better to cut teachers in the academic areas and increase class sizes across the board. Mrs. Williams said that at the elementary level class size would grow to approximately 30 students and they would not be able to learn in this environment. When class sizes are that large it becomes behavior management and not about learning. This is not a scare tactic and the choices need to be made in order to live within the budget given to the district.

Mrs. Williams said that additional classroom cuts would need to be made as outlined in Scenario 1 or they could choose Scenario 2 which would cut athletics and co-curricular activities. Again it is felt that the schools primary responsibility is to core academics so they would choose Scenario 2.

Keith Boyle feels there would be a wave of students leaving East Bridgewater if athletics are cut. The administrative team feels that the classroom cuts would be more devastating.

Mrs. Kitchenham said that the last few years we needed to go to Town Meeting with a deficit as a result of operational costs. A reduction in personnel was needed and it didn’t occur. She would like to see the line items properly funded so we can pay the bills without needing to transfer funds between accounts.

Mr. Margie feels this is a process and we need to come up with the best solution for the children of the town. The town also has to take care of the rest of the community. He appreciates all of the work being done by the School Committee, Administrative staff, and for Liz volunteering her time with the efforts.

Mrs. Williams wants to acknowledge that as a school department we haven’t held to sustaining the difficult decisions. Decisions should have been made along the way and it didn’t happen.

Elizabeth Legault thanked everyone and was grateful to be a part of this meeting. These decisions will affect the entire community. The schools are the largest employer in the community and we cannot open our doors without teachers, kids, or programming. She has heard all that has been said and the transparency needs to continue. If anyone has any ideas or solutions, out of the box thinking, please write to us. As an educator for twenty four years she knows it would be too difficult to increase class sizes and it is not a good idea to let kids out early. We have requirements that need to be filled and we will be looking forward and not backwards at what has occurred. Her plan is to be visible and to work with the town. The Special Education Department cannot be underfunded and we should not underfund any area. Opportunity and access needs to be available for every student.

EAST BRIDGEWATER SCHOOL COMMUNITY MISSION STATEMENT
The East Bridgewater Public Schools provides a comprehensive curriculum that prepares students to be critical thinkers, problem solvers, and effective communicators ready to assume their positions as responsible productive citizens.
Mr. McKinnon applauds the work done and the process. He would like to know the ramifications to the district in regards to accreditation and standardized test scores. He feels the absence of a well-rounded curriculum is very concerning.

Mrs. Pennington is concerned with the social and emotional effects these cuts will have on children. Eliminating the special areas will not allow children to have fun during the day. Mrs. Williams said that from and educator’s perspective core academics outweigh specials. Parents can seek out art, music, and athletics on their own. This then becomes a financial burden to families.

Mrs. McAlpine asked Ms. Legault about her experience in other districts on moving forward after cuts like these were made. Her response was that once you get behind the 8 ball you tend to stay there and it is very difficult to reinstate things that were cut. East Bridgewater has a 95% graduation rate and she does not want to go backwards. If the district is running in a deficit every year it is an indication that something is wrong. We need to give kids total opportunity and access. We will find a way and make it happen. We have a pro-active group and will find a solution; our glass is half full not half empty. Ms. Legault wants to sit down with the town officials to compare numbers. She wants to do this once and to get it right.

Mrs. Kitchenham thanked all of the teachers, parents, and community members for attending. Please email the School Committee with any questions you may have. We will continue to get information out to everyone and have open and honest communications with the Finance Committee and Board of Selectman.

Motion to adjourn at 8:10 PM by: Maltz/ McKinnon  

Vote: 6 in favor

Respectfully submitted by,

Joanne M. Benner
Recording Clerk