

Board of Education  
Worth School District 127

**Minutes of the Regular Board of Education Meeting**

**November 8, 2023 - 6:00 p.m.**

**Dr. Rosemary Lucas Administration Building**  
**11218 S. Ridgeland Ave, Worth, Illinois**

**Administrators:**

Dr. Mark Fleming, Superintendent  
Cindy Dykas, Assistant Superintendent, Business Manager/CSBO  
Dr. Sinead Chambers, Director of Student Services  
Jason Tooth, Worth Junior High Principal  
Melissa Wills, Assistant Principal, WJH  
Dr. Maureen Eichstaedt, Principal, Worth Elementary  
Elizabeth D'Andrea, Assistant Principal, Worth Elementary  
Ashley Toms, Principal, Worthwoods  
Robert Jeffers, Director of Technology  
David Dvorchak, Director of Facilities and Grounds

**Board Recording Secretary**

Jill Moore

**Others Present**

Jennifer Decker, Auditors  
Scott Duenser, Auditors  
Jeff Pagano, WW  
Michelle Okrzesik, WE  
Lisa Strzempa, WE  
JoAnne Albrecht, WJH  
Colleen DeGonia, WJH  
Mary Zirngibl, WE  
Alyssa Zirngibl, WE

**1. MEETING OPENING**

**A. CALL TO ORDER**

President Drew Sernus called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

**B. ROLL CALL**

Members Present: Drew Sernus, Meghan Sisk, Michelle Egan, Vince Flores, David Blanks, Missy Sinclair  
Absent: Danette Keeler

**C. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

President, Drew Sernus led the Pledge of Allegiance

**2. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT**

**A. VETERAN'S DAY - HONORING OUR VETERANS**

Dr. Fleming opened by stating that being able to stand in freedom to state the Pledge of Allegiance would not be possible without the Veterans such as our very own Veteran, Vince Flores, who served in the Air Force. Thank you for your service and sacrifice Mr. Flores. All schools will take time to honor Veterans and teach students the importance of Veterans Day activities this week.

Dr. Fleming stated that his next item is not on the agenda, but wanted to take a moment to highlight a special accomplishment earned by Worth 127 today. Today was the districts annual life safety walk through and am pleased to announce that the district earned a 100% with zero violations. Please join me in giving a special thanks to Dave Dvorchak and Cindy Dykas along with the custodial team a round of applause for their hard work in preparing for the Life Safety walk through. Thank you to all Admin. and staff for paying great attention to detail regarding safety.

#### B. FISHING CLUB UPDATE

Dr. Fleming asked Officer Cozzi to come up and bring up the team of students and parents that came to talk about their season in Fishing Club. Officer Cozzi stated that Leah and Kendall caught the most fish on the team. When the club started last year, we had approximately 15 kids and we now average 30 - 40 kids and its really turned into a family and community event. We've gotten our 2024 dates approved by Lake Katherine and are looking forward to a new season of fishing. Next year, we are going to "spice" things up a bit and the police department will be giving gift cards to students who have caught the biggest and the most fish. Officer Cozzi thanked the Board of Education for all their support and allowing the district to do Fishing Club.

Dr. Fleming thanked Officer Cozzi for always having a vision to find unique ways to support students. The district appreciated Chief Denton and Mayor Werner for the continued collaboration with the police department and village.

For those of you that may have missed Officer Cozzi's Zoom Meeting on the dangers of vaping on Monday night, please consider watching the presentation which is posted to the district's website. Vaping is extremely dangerous and often misunderstood. Thank you Officer Cozzi for bringing an awareness to something that is nothing but damaging our students.

#### C. NATIONAL SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS APPRECIATION DAY - NOVEMBER 15, 2023

Dr. Fleming thanked all Board Members for their incredible dedication and volunteer service in supporting students, families and staff. The work accomplished over the years in Worth 127 would not have occurred without you sacrificing your time in supporting the district's vision to continually improve the learning environment for students and working environment for staff. The facilities, resources and professional development that the Board has supported is appreciated by all. Board Members each received a gift on behalf of the district.

#### D. FY23 AUDIT PRESENTATION

Dr. Fleming introduced Mr. Scott Duenser, to give a brief overview of the FY23 Audit Presentation:

##### Financial Highlights

- In total, net position increased by \$2.5M. This represents a 6% increase from 2022.
- General revenues accounted for \$18.6M in revenue or 74% of all revenues. Program specific revenues in the form of charges for services and fees and grants accounted for \$6.4M or 26% of total revenues of \$25M.
- The District had \$22.5M in expenses related to government activities. However, only \$6.4M of these expenses were offset by program specific charges and grants.
- The District continued to pay down its existing debt through retirements, resulting in a net decrease of \$0.8M to its long term debt in fiscal 2023.

#### E. 2023 RESOLUTIONS COMMITTEE REPORT

Dr. Fleming shared with the Board the 2023 Resolutions Committee Report and the new recommendations that have been made by the Illinois Association of School Boards (IASB) as follows:

1. Industrial Construction: Do not Adopt
2. School Resource Officer Funding: Do Adopt
3. Bus Driver Regulations: Do Adopt
4. Employment History Review: Do not Adopt
5. Alternative Safe School Funding: Do not Adopt

#### F. METROPOLITAN WATER RECLAMATION DISTRICT (MWRD)

Dr. Fleming shared with the Board that collaboration with MWRD is not going as anticipated. MWRD mailed an agreement that they wanted signed by November 22; however, it's not what we want to agree to. I have since updated Tom Melody and he emailed them with the district's concerns and we are waiting for their reply.

#### G. UPDATE ON WORTHWOODS/WORTH JUNIOR HIGH CONSTRUCTION PROJECT

Dr. Fleming stated that the Admin. team is working with DLA as the architects complete the final plan for the bid process:

- The prebid meeting will take place on Tuesday, November 21st

- The bid opening meeting will take place on Tuesday, December 19th.
- The Board will take action at the January 10, 2024 meeting to approve the lowest responsible bidder.
- Projects will start in the spring and be completed in August 2025.

#### H. ILLINOIS SCHOOL REPORT CARD DESIGNATIONS

Congratulations to Worthwoods, Worth Elementary and Worth Junior High on earning commendable designations on the annual school report card. Commendable is the 2nd highest designation a school can receive so Worth 127 did very well. At the December meeting, Mrs. Esposito and the principals will share a presentation on school report card data and the instructional interventionists will share a presentation on MTSS Data.

#### I. FOIA REQUESTS

Since the last Board Meeting, the district has received and responded to two FOIA Requests.

### 3. BUSINESS MANAGER

#### **BOE Presentation notes 11/8/2023**

##### **1. Estimated 2023 Tax Levy**

##### **Slide 2 - Review basic terms of the tax levy process**

- Mentioned that 2022 final tax extension reports were just released 10/3. They are usually finalized in June. This is the second year the reports were massively delayed.
- Taxpayers in Cook County have very recently received their final tax bills for 2022 -- were mailed out Nov. 1<sup>st</sup> (usually August 1<sup>st</sup>) and will be due by December 1<sup>st</sup>.
- Fortunate to have healthy fund balances since our main revenue stream has been cut off by the delay of property tax bills.
- With the CPI at 6.5%, greater than 5% for the second year in a row, PTELL is in effect, as is the Truth in Taxation which requires a public hearing on the tax levy in December.

##### **Slide 3 - P.A. 102-0895**

- New section of the School Code, effective May 23, 2022
- Each School District now must publicly disclose the cash reserve balance of all funds held by the school district related to its operational levy
- Disclosures must occur at the public hearing at which the district certifies its budget and levy for the taxable year
- Worth School District 127 has complied with this by posting this information in Board Docs each month
- As of June 30, 2023, the Operational Cash Reserve Balances (all funds except Debt Service) was near \$15,700,000

##### **Slide 4 - Revenues**

- Property Tax collections made up 48% of total revenue in Fiscal Year 2023
- Five years ago, before ESSER funding with considerably less EBF, Property Tax collections made up 58% of total revenue. EBF in that year was 30% and Federal programs was 5.7%

##### **Slide 5 & 6 - 10-Year History of Revenue Collected**

- Property taxes have remained very constant over a 10-year period, in fact see the significant reduction in 2021 due to Property Tax Relief Grant AND EAV increase, which gives an overall relief to all taxpayers
- In 10 years', our total revenue has increased by 60%, from \$13.3 M in 2014 to just over \$21 M in 2023
- Evidence Based Funding (formerly General State Aid) increased over 300% from 2014, helping Property Taxes stay constant
- The large increase of Federal Programs from 2020 – 2022 was directly related to funds received for ESSER (Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief) from ARP (American Rescue Plan)
- Another visual showing how much both revenue and expenditures have grown over 10 years.
- 2022 was the first year of deficit spending in over 15 years.
- This shows a \$7.2 million surplus over ten years' time

##### **Slide 8 - EAV**

- 2020 was \$211 million (10 year high)
- 2021 dropped almost 10%

- Anticipating 10-15% increase in our final 2023 tax rate report, after triennial reassessment

#### **Slide 8 - Worth School District 127 Tax Rate**

- 2020 was a 10 year low at 4.492 (lowest since 2010 when it was 3.751)
- Thanks to Property Tax Relief Grant
- Has been steadily increasing again, at in 2022 it was 5.320
  - EAV drops, tax rate increases

#### **Slide 9 - CPI (Inflation)**

- Row above is a year over year extension increase, which is roughly CPI and very minimal increases
- 2019 was a sharp decline because it was the first opportunity for the Property Tax Relief Grant
- 2020 and 2021 were low increases due to low CPI and continuing to receive PTRG
- 2022 was up as a result of CPI being at 7.0% (again, capped at 5.0%)

#### **Slide 11 -Just because you levy (ask) you don't receive (extension)**

#### **Slide 12 - A community wide mailer was last sent out in November 2022**

- We want to remind our community that our tax rates are lower than past years due to the PTRG.
- How do we get the funds that are not coming in from Property Taxes? It's an additional component of State Funds through Evidence Based Funding.
- This relief grant continues through the current 2022 tax bills that taxpayers just received
- **GOOD NEWS!** We just found out that Worth 127 qualifies for a third cycle in a row for the Property Tax Relief Grant. We will discuss in the next item on the agenda.

#### **Slide 14 - Now the hard part – Creating the 2023 Property Tax Levy!**

- How much do we need in each fund to pay current bills?
- Have to guess at how much the 2023 EAV will be valued at? Won't know until next year, so it's a guess. This is more difficult this year because it is a reassessment year!
- Have to guess at how much new property will be incurring taxes in 2023. Won't know until next year.
- Evaluate these three variables and take into consideration the maximum rate allowed in some of the funds
- Again, a Levy is not a guarantee. It will be closer to the 2022 extension times CPI 5%, so closer to \$9.5-9.8 million, not \$11.3 we are requesting.

#### **Next Steps**

- The board will approve a resolution (Item E) under Motions, in this meeting. The resolution is for the Estimated amount of money to be raised for taxation for 2023.
- At the December meeting, we will hold a Truth in Taxation hearing.
- This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> consecutive cycle, which lasts for two years of relief funds
- Qualification based on EAV and tax rate, among other factors
- Worth 127 must abate \$1,054,641 in the 2023 tax year.
- We will then receive \$1,012,834 in Evidence Based Funding for FY24
- Essentially costs the district \$41,807 in FY24 and FY25, but we continue to capture the extra \$1 mm every year beyond that.
- A motion will be approved in the late winter/early spring to move forward with this, if the Board chooses

#### **3.) Life Safety Amendment and School Maintenance Project Grant**

- The architects initiated an amendment for our 10 year Health/Life Safety document. This amendment will add to the list the need to "remove and replace the existing galvanized domestic cold and hot water piping serving toilet rooms and other fixtures that have deteriorated and has leaks".
- By amending the health/life safety items, we will be able to access funds in the Health/Life safety fund that are specifically earmarked for these needed repairs
- We have over \$1 mm in Fund 90 – Health/Life Safety Fund – for items on this list. Replacing the galvanized piping was not previously on the list and we need it done during construction, so once this is approved (Item C, under motions) we

will be able to do the work using these restrictive funds.

- In addition, the School Maintenance Project Grant application is specifically referencing this same project, which will give us \$50,000 towards this work which is estimated to cost \$150,000.
- The SMPG application requires approval as well, see item D under motions

#### **4.) Health/Wellness Screenings for Staff and family members**

- A full panel blood test can detect the potential for many illnesses and early detection is key!
- Continuing with the Wellness Initiatives offered by the school district and thanks to the Board of education for the additional incentive for those who participate in the Health Savings Account PPO Medical Plan, this year's Wellness Screenings were a huge success.
- We offered two dates for In-District wellness screenings, by Empower Health Services.
- About 70 people were screened over the two days, followed up with individualized confidential and comprehensive reports
- Also, staff and their family members who are members in our health plan can go to any LabCorp location for the Wellness Screenings, which serviced an additional 18 participants and likely more before the November 30<sup>th</sup> deadline!
- In addition, Osco Pharmacists were on site offering flu, tetanus and COVID booster shots.

#### **5.) Health/Life Safety Walk Through earlier today**

KUDOS to our amazing Facilities Team, Dave Dvorchak, Krystyna Nowak and all the building custodians for having us ready to go for our annual walk through! They found zero violations!

#### **4. DIRECTOR OF SPECIAL SERVICES**

No Report

#### **5. DIRECTOR OF CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION**

No Report

#### **6. CITIZENS' REMARKS - AGENDA AND NON-AGENDA ITEMS**

No Citizens Remarks

#### **7. CONSENT AGENDA**

##### **Action (Consent): A. CONSENT AGENDA ITEMS**

Resolution: Recommended Motion (roll call): "that the Board of Education approve the following Consent Agenda Items as presented."

Motion by Meghan Sisk, second by David Blanks.

Final Resolution: Motion Carried

Yes: Drew Sernus, David Blanks, Meghan Sisk, Michelle Egan, Vince Flores, Missy Sinclair

##### **Action (Consent): B. BOARD BILLS PAYABLE**

Resolution: Recommended Motion (roll call): "that the Board of Education approve the Accounts Payable for \$566,406.20 (EDUCATIONAL); \$137,349.47 (OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE); \$13,736.04 (TRANSPORTATION); and \$129,636.92 (CAPITAL PROJECTS) for a total of \$847,128.63."

Recommended Motion (roll call): "that the Board of Education approve the following Consent Agenda Items as presented."

Motion by Meghan Sisk, second by David Blanks.

Final Resolution: Motion Carried

Yes: Drew Sernus, David Blanks, Meghan Sisk, Michelle Egan, Vince Flores, Missy Sinclair

##### **Action (Consent): C. PAYROLL SUMMARY**

Resolution: Recommended Motion (roll call): "that the Board of Education approve the Payroll Summary for the Education Fund in the amount of \$735,501.40, the Building Fund in the amount of \$48,843.55, and the FICA/IMRF/Medicare in the amount of \$45,181.30."

Recommended Motion (roll call): "that the Board of Education approve the following Consent Agenda Items as presented."

Motion by Meghan Sisk, second by David Blanks.

Final Resolution: Motion Carried

Yes: Drew Sernus, David Blanks, Meghan Sisk, Michelle Egan, Vince Flores, Missy Sinclair

Action (Consent): D. RESIGNATION OF CLASSIFIED STAFF - STEVE NEUHAUS - PART TIME CUSTODIAN - WORTHWOODS ELEMENTARY - EFFECTIVE OCTOBER 14, 2023

Recommended Motion (roll call): "that the Board of Education approve the following Consent Agenda Items as presented."

Motion by Meghan Sisk, second by David Blanks.

Final Resolution: Motion Carried

Yes: Drew Sernus, David Blanks, Meghan Sisk, Michelle Egan, Vince Flores, Missy Sinclair

Action (Consent): E. ANNE MARIE BERTHOLD - CERTIFIED STAFF - REQUEST FOR CONTRACTUAL LEAVE OF ABSENCE - SUBSEQUENT TO FMLA

Recommended Motion (roll call): "that the Board of Education approve the following Consent Agenda Items as presented."

Motion by Meghan Sisk, second by David Blanks.

Final Resolution: Motion Carried

Yes: Drew Sernus, David Blanks, Meghan Sisk, Michelle Egan, Vince Flores, Missy Sinclair

Action (Consent): F. CATHY WILSON - CERTIFIED STAFF - REQUEST FOR CONTRACTUAL LEAVE OF ABSENCE - INTERMITTENT FMLA

Recommended Motion (roll call): "that the Board of Education approve the following Consent Agenda Items as presented."

Motion by Meghan Sisk, second by David Blanks.

Final Resolution: Motion Carried

Yes: Drew Sernus, David Blanks, Meghan Sisk, Michelle Egan, Vince Flores, Missy Sinclair

**8. MOTIONS**

Action: A. REGULAR BOARD MINUTES

Recommended Motion (roll call): "that the Board of Education approve the minutes of the October 11, 2023 regular meeting."

Motion by David Blanks, second by Vince Flores.

Final Resolution: Motion Carried

Yes: Drew Sernus, David Blanks, Meghan Sisk, Michelle Egan, Vince Flores

Abstain: Missy Sinclair

Action: B. CLOSED SESSION MINUTES

Recommended Motion (roll call): "that the Board of Education approve the minutes of the October 11, 2023 closed session meeting."

Motion by David Blanks, second by Meghan Sisk.

Final Resolution: Motion Carried

Yes: Drew Sernus, David Blanks, Meghan Sisk, Michelle Egan, Vince Flores

Abstain: Missy Sinclair

Action: C. HEALTH/LIFE SAFETY AMENDMENT #9 - WORTH JUNIOR HIGH

Recommended Motion (roll call): "that the Board of Education approve the Request for Authorization to use Fire Prevention and Safety funds (Life Safety), Amendment #9, for Worth Junior High."

Motion by Vince Flores, second by Michelle Egan.

Final Resolution: Motion Carried

Yes: Drew Sernus, David Blanks, Meghan Sisk, Michelle Egan, Vince Flores, Missy Sinclair

Action: D. APPROVAL OF FY24 SCHOOL MAINTENANCE PROJECT GRANT

Recommended Motion (roll call): "that the Board of Education approve the application to proceed with applying for a \$50,000 School Maintenance Project Grant for Fiscal Year 2024."

Motion by Missy Sinclair, second by Vince Flores.

Final Resolution: Motion Carried

Yes: Drew Sernus, David Blanks, Meghan Sisk, Michelle Egan, Vince Flores, Missy Sinclair

Action: E. ESTIMATED 2023 TAX LEVY

Recommended Motion (roll call): "that the Board of Education adopt the Resolution determining the estimated amount of money to be raised by taxation for 2023 and establish the Board meeting of December 13, 2023, as the time for the public hearing regarding the levy, as recommended by the Assistant Superintendent for Business Services/CSBO and the Superintendent, as presented in the attached documents in 3 A.

Motion by Vince Flores, second by David Blanks.

Final Resolution: Motion Carried

Yes: Drew Sernus, David Blanks, Meghan Sisk, Michelle Egan, Vince Flores, Missy Sinclair

Action: F. ACCEPTANCE OF AUDITOR'S REPORT FOR FY2023

Recommended Motion (roll call): "that the Board of Education accept the Auditor's Report, as recommended by the Assistant Superintendent/CSBO and the Superintendent".

Motion by Michelle Egan, second by Missy Sinclair.

Final Resolution: Motion Carried

Yes: Drew Sernus, David Blanks, Meghan Sisk, Michelle Egan, Vince Flores, Missy Sinclair

**9. BOARD DISCUSSION/ACTION AND/OR REPORTS/REQUESTS**

- Board Member asked Dr. Fleming if he could provide the drawings/plans for the MWRD. Dr. Fleming stated that he will attach the information to his Board update this week.
- Board Member thanked and applauded all staff and administration of all their hard work.
- Board Member thanked Officer Cozzi for all his efforts with the Fishing Club.
- Board Member commented that two players from Shepard HS have moved up to the varsity level -- Kudos to our retiring coaches for all their work in training our students.
- Board Member expressed her appreciation for Worth's Science Teacher and having a new teacher in that position.
- Board Member stated that he has seen several of Worth's students advancing to higher levels since moving on to District 218 and District 230.
- Board Member stated that he attended that South Cook Division Meeting in October and the superintendent that spoke was a very good speaker; he had a very interesting background and spoke about leadership.

**10. CITIZENS' REMARKS - AGENDA ITEMS**

No Citizens' Remarks

**11. CLOSED SESSION**

No Closed Session

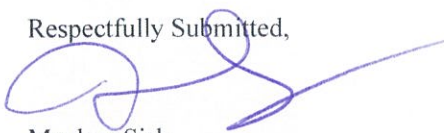
**12. ADJOURNMENT**

Recommended Motion (voice vote): "that the Board of Education motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:09 p.m."

Voice Vote: All Yes

Final Resolution: Motion Carried

Respectfully Submitted,



Meghan Sisk

Secretary, Board of Education



Drew Sernus

President, Board of Education