

MEETING MINUTES OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The Education Committee met on Monday, March 21, 2016, in Meeting Room 1, Newtown Municipal Center, 3 Primrose Lane, Newtown. Chairman Neil Chaudhary called the meeting to order at 7:09 pm.

Present: Mr. Amaral, Mr. Carroll, Mr. Chaudhary, Mr. Filiato, Mr. Lundquist, and Mr. Wiedemann

Present from the Board of Education: Mr. Alexander, Ms. Harriman-Stites, Dr. Erardi

Also present were several members from the public.

PUBLIC COMMENT: Carla Kron requested that meeting minutes include vote tallies identifying individual members' votes. Added that student participation funds are funds that belong to individual students and school groups. Lastly, suggested that any potential changes to school security, as discussed by the LC Municipal Operations Cmt, should be left to Dr. Erardi and security experts to make that call.

Mr. Carol moved to accept the minutes of the March 16, 2016 meeting. Mr. Wiedemann seconded. The motion passed without objection.

DISCUSSION OF BOE 2016-2017 BUDGET

Discussion opened with Dr. Erardi pointing out that the BOF recommended reduction of \$80K in medical claims was not a reliable calculation and was not supported by the Employee Medical Benefits Board. Mr. Chaudhary explained that the LC Education Committee would likely leave it as a discussion item for the full Legislative Council Discussion, while Mr. Lundquist suggested that the LC Education Committee could choose to make a recommendation to the LC.

Mr. Chaudhary clarified that the SRO/SSO security positions are under the purview of the LC Municipal Operations Committee, and would not be included as part of the current discussion. Mr. Wiedemann stated that the committees are technically making recommendations to the full Legislative Council, to which Dr. Erardi further clarified that the LC, itself, has line item authority over the municipal budget, and that specific decisions on SRO/SSO positions will fall under municipal operations rather than BOE.

On the topic of staffing, Mr. Filiato asked about the role and need for assistant principals at the high school. Dr. Erardi explained that they spend a high majority of their time conducting teacher evaluations, with the balance spent on discipline and general management of school operations. Mr. Lundquist asked Dr. Erardi about high school department chairs and their relative teaching load. Dr. Erardi answered that department chairs in large departments may teach as few as 3 classes while also taking on many responsibilities, including teacher assessments and other administrative duties, ultimately leading to longer days than many teachers. He also explained that the role is assigned based on specific skill sets and not a matter of seniority.

Mr. Chaudhary asked about drivers of the ongoing increases in Special Education cost increases. Dr. Erardi responded that there have been children identified at younger ages, requiring services for long periods of time, noting that the school system is responsible for children from age 3 to 21. Also, more parents are bringing in legal advocates to push for services for their children, often times resulting in financial impacts due to legal services and settlements, as well as service outplacements that can cost

\$275K+ per student. There is also an ongoing interest to provide best practices for our student population with identified special needs. Additionally, part of the spike in costs has also been due to post 12/14 services (i.e., home tutoring).

Mr. Wiedemann asked Dr. Erardi about \$9000 in new costs for LinkCrew at the high school. This is a national program that has existed in years prior, focusing on providing mentorship and buddy-support from student leaders and National Honors Society members matched up with incoming 9th graders to aid in the transition to high school. Program was previously funded under a grant. However, BOE budget now includes funds to be split among three faculty advisors.

Topic turned to transportation, with questions around the current bus contract, the upcoming large fifth year increase built into the current contract (+\$252,468 in '16-17), and the potential to negotiate a reduction in the year-5 increase. Specifically, the year-5 increase could be reduced by agreeing to a contract extension. Discussion also included the possibility that the bus contract could instead be put back out to bid. At this point Mr. Carroll led a discussion around the history of bus routing and required number of busses, stating that in 2003 there was a similar number of students as there are today, yet the Owner Operators were able to run a 4-tier plan with 24 full size and 9 mini busses. Mr. Carroll suggested that the BOE could consider returning to a four-tier system today and remove 18 busses at a significant savings of \$1.2MM (All Star is current running 42 full size busses and 8 special education vans). Mr. Carroll went on to suggest there may be a conflict of interest in relying on All Star to determine bus routing, opining that while bus routes have been tweaked since All Star took on the routing responsibility, they've never truly taken a fresh look at optimizing bus routing in Newtown. Dr. Erardi offered to invite a well-known transportation consulting firm to come in and audit Newtown's transportation plan, and provide a definitive point of view regarding routing. Dr. Erardi pointed to p271 in budget book to question some of Mr. Carroll's statements, asking how could we have seen such a drop in Transportation costs from 2011/12 to 2012/13 (\$840,000) in the switch from Owner Operators to All-Star if Mr. Carroll's figures are correct. Mr. Carroll suggested the possibility of a contract structure that provided an artificially low Yr-1 price leading to a very high Yr-5 price. End result is a net reduction in student population of roughly 500 students, while experiencing a \$500,000+ increase in transportation costs. Dr. Erardi reminded the group that there was already a reduction in the number of busses the previous year, and committed to doing additional research to provide a more complete understanding of Mr. Carroll's assertions. Mr. Chaudhary, Mr. Wiedemann and Mr. Lundquist shared their discomfort with the potential sub-optimization of bus routing, and considered that a fresh perspective may allow a reduction in required busses. However, Mr. Lundquist maintained that we should distinguish between potential routing improvements that may or may not be possible, and any tangible dollar amount that could be justified based on what we know today. (SEE ATTACHMENTS FROM MR CARROLL)

Topic turned to staffing and equipment inquiries. Mr. Wiedemann asked about larger than expected increases in the Reed Classroom teacher line (p280) of \$74,513. Dr. Erardi explained that this was a contractual increase that included salary and STEP increases.

Mr. Wiedemann asked about need for a new truck to replace existing truck for \$52,000. Mr. Alexander reported that the maintenance staff was planning to take the old truck off the road for safety reasons, but a replacement was needed. Mr. Wiedemann suggested the BOE could consider using the town's capital non-recurring fund to save money over two years for a new truck rather than replace this year.

Mr. Wiedemann then asked about the need for tree work, questioning why this would be a BOE expense rather than a town expense. General answer is that it is in anticipation of storm damage, based on recent experience, which could not be handled by town DPW, but that they would plan to use the same subcontractor that the town uses. ADDITION INFORMATION/FOLLOW-UP INCLUDED AS ATTACHMENT.

Mr. Lundquist asked the reasons driving the BOE's current spending freeze. Dr. Erardi explained that early in the school year they proactively locked down \$750,000 from all non-essential accounts in recognition of unanticipated special education costs (due to new students entering the school system as well as some parent-led student outplacements which would include legal and tuition expenses). The spending freeze continues, but Dr. Erardi is comfortable that incremental expenses will be covered adequately through the remainder of the school year.

Mr. Chaudhary asked for more detail on how the schedule for new technology obsolescence and replacement is calculated, seeking clarity on why a newly purchased item will simultaneously add cost in the budget for planned replacement at a later date. Dr. Erardi will follow-up with additional detail and explanation. ADDITION INFORMATION/FOLLOW-UP INCLUDED AS ATTACHMENT.

Mr. Wiedemann asked about need to repaint stadium bleachers (\$8500), as well as need to refinish the gym floors (\$12,000). He questioned whether that was a task that should be completed by P&R rather than represent a BOE expense. Dr. Erardi will provide justification/explanation. ADDITION INFORMATION/FOLLOW-UP INCLUDED AS ATTACHMENT.

Mr. Amaral stated a general concern that people he's spoken with do not understand or accept that the school population can be falling while the BOE budget continues to increase. He stated that real reductions may be difficult to find until a school facility is closed. Dr. Erardi stated that he has had meetings with seniors to explain the sources of this year's budget increases, primarily driven by increases in health insurance costs, increasing special education costs, contractual increases, but no early retirement packages available to help offset costs.

MOTIONS

Mr. Carroll moved to reduce transportation by \$57,000. Mr. Wiedemann seconded. Amount represents a total of 2 busses including the BOF suggested reduction. Motion passed: 5 YES (Carroll, Wiedemann, Chaudhary, Filiato, Amaral) to 1 NO (Lundquist).

Mr. Lundquist moved to recommend restoring the \$80,000 in reduced medical claims cited as a reduction by the Board of Finance. Mr. Chaudhary seconded. Motion failed: 2 YES (Lundquist, Chaudhary) to 4 NO (Carroll, Wiedemann, Filiato, Amaral)

Mr. Wiedemann moved to reduce equipment by \$26,000 for truck replacement. Mr. Carroll seconded. Suggestion was reduction of half, with the assumption that the remaining \$26,000 could be placed in town's non-recurring capital fund to save over a two year period. Motion failed: 2 YES (Wiedemann, Carroll) to 4 NO (Chaudhary, Filiato, Amaral, Lundquist).

Mr. Wiedemann moved to reduce BOE budget by \$20,000 for tree work. Mr. Carroll seconded. Motion failed: 3 YES (Wiedeman, Carroll, Amaral) to 3 NO (Chaudhary, Filiato, Lundquist).

Mr. Wiedemann moved to reduce BOE budget by \$8,500 for bleacher painting. Mr. Carroll seconded. Motion failed: 2 YES (Wiedemann, Carroll) to 4 NO (Chaudhary, Filiato, Amaral, Lundquist).

FINAL RECOMMENDATION TO LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL:

Mr. Filiato moved to reduce the Board of Education Budget by \$407,001, representing \$350,001 recommended by the BOE, and \$57,000 from transportation. Mr. Carroll seconded. Motion passed: 5 YES (Carroll, Wiedemann, Chaudhary, Filiato, Amaral) to 1 NO (Lundquist).

PUBLIC COMMENT: None

Mr. Lundquist moved to adjourn at 9:37pm. Mr. Carroll seconded.

APPENDIX: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

From: Keith Alexander [mailto:alexanderk_boe@newtown.k12.ct.us]

Sent: Tuesday, March 22, 2016 12:03 PM

To: nkc@4newtown.com

Cc: 'Erardi, Joe' <erardij@newtown.k12.ct.us>

Subject: RE: Follow-up

Hi Neil,

Here are the responses from the questions at last night's meeting.

Stadium Painting - Because the concrete bleachers are so old, annually, they are power washed and repainted. The paint appropriation is for work this summer. The work is sub-contracted out.

Floors - Once again, annually done with sub-contractors.

The bleacher repainting and floor re-finishing are in the budget every year. This was the first year that we supplied the detail by contactor. The history shows that we've paid \$8,000 for the bleacher re-painting and about \$8,500 for the HS gym floor.

Trees - Gino does work in partnership with Fred on this; however, with 60 sq miles Fred has one crew which many times may be dealing with town emergencies. The increase is shifting of appropriate funds into this account as in past years the work was done through Gino's emergency repair line item. In addition to emergency work, continuous tree work takes place with sight lines and safety. This work is also done via a subcontractor.

The tree work appears to be mostly storm removal and the take down of dead/dangerous trees. In the current year, we've actually spent \$9,500 (budgeted \$2,200) and in 2014 we spent \$43,000.

All of this work is rolled up into one account, contracted services.

Thanks for your continued advocacy for children.....greatly appreciated.

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Respectfully,

Keith Alexander

Chair, Newtown Board of Education

<http://www.newtown.k12.ct.us/>

From: Erardi, Joe [<mailto:erardij@newtown.k12.ct.us>]

Sent: Tuesday, March 22, 2016 11:28 AM

To: Keith Alexander <alexanderk_boe@newtown.k12.ct.us>; nkc@4newtown.com; Carmella Amodeo <amodeoc@newtown.k12.ct.us>

Subject: Follow-up

Neil

I thought the best way to drill down on your question was to have Carm give you a call so she could fully understand the intent.....she will be calling you today.

JE

Dr. Joseph V. Erardi, Jr.
Superintendent of Schools
Newtown Public Schools

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ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FROM THE LC EDUCATION COMMITTEE TO THE BOE

1) What are the bussing guidelines for children who have access to sidewalks? How far can they be asked to walk?

According to Board Policy, the maximum walking distance from a pupil's property entrance way to the bus pickup point or to school is as follows: Grades K-8: 1 mile Grades 9-12: 1.5 miles
Exceptions to the walking limits would be considered under the following conditions:

1) Physical disability limitations

2) Unusual conditions or hazards along walking location to a designated bus stop.

Currently, there are no sidewalks in town with the exception of along Main St. from the police department heading north, a portion of Church Hill, Queen St. and Glover, but these are still door to door stops. Years back, under the owner-operators, it was requested that "sidewalk stops" be combined. They were told these areas had to be door stops because it was deemed unsafe for students to walk along the sidewalks to general stops.

2) In light of same, how would implementation of the extensive sidewalk system planned for town center impact the number for busses necessary for Hawley, Sandy Hook, the Middle School and the High School?

Based on the details above, this would be an issue. There are not a lot of students for HS/MS located in the immediate center of town to pick up, so it does not help to reduce the number of buses. You would also need to add sidewalks beyond the immediate center of town to reach the high school on Route 34.

With regards to Hawley students, you might be able to cut one (1) bus, based on the above walking parameters. However, a crossing guard would be needed on Glover and at Church Hill for students crossing high-travel roads. The same holds true for Sandy Hook (new school). If sidewalks were to be put in around the schools, there would still be a need for crossing guards (this is assuming sidewalks were put in both side of Riverside Rd.) You would still need to run buses on the offshoots of Riverside Rd. It would be difficult to estimate how many children would walk to the elementary schools at this point for reasons being; 1) implementation and completion of the sidewalk project and 2) parent opposition would be in great numbers for elementary aged children.

3) We discussed cost difference related to 20,000 gallons of fuel oil from MGS moving to natural gas. I believe we were given the cost of the oil but not the expected increase in natural gas. Can this analysis—included the price per unit for gas be provided AND that the same analysis be done for SHS?

MG 20,000 gallons of oil at \$1.4253 per gallon equals \$28,506. Natural gas usage is estimated to be at approximately 30,000 ccf for an estimated cost of \$28,000 to \$30,000. SHS was initially estimated high due to the uncertainty and complexity of the building and has subsequently been reduced by \$26,000. The current requested budget for SHS is \$66,351. Uncertainty still

remains around the demand portion of the bill which accounts for approximately 40% of the cost. The demand is unknown until the school is operation.

Reed school is currently at \$.50 per square foot. Sandy Hook is at about \$.76 (this includes the kitchen) We applied a higher rate for Sandy Hook again, due to the uncertainty & complexity of design and the unknown cost of demand

- 4) Can a more details accounting be provided showing the details of the student activity fund showing the earmarks? Is it the case that if Joey gives \$10 for a trip that there will be exactly \$10 for that trip paid out to Joey/for Joey's trip? I am still trying to understand the end of year fund balance. Are there case where students have overpaid (expected trip was cheaper than expected as an example) and if so what happens to those funds? Again, given the large balance—are these funds earning any return? If so where is that general fund revenue or does it stay in the activity fund?**

In the event that there is a surplus in an activity account because the cost of a field trip ended being cheaper than anticipated, or when parents fund-raised money and not all the money was expended, the funds remain in the said activity account and the balance is carried over to the next year.

The accounts carry interest and the interest stays in the activity fund. The interest is allocated to each account proportionally according to the account year-end balance.

- 5) Was only the "Boland" plan examined for possible bus reduction or where other strategies considered? For example, if there are 2 22 minute routes in close proximity could they be combined render them closer to the current max without changing that max?**

Those suggestions were reviewed and the review information was sent to the Legislative Council in a document named BOF Transportation Reply 3-9-16 which may have crossed in the mail with this question. Other transportation reductions were discussed numerous times with All-Star ownership and management. Without a compromise on time bus arrivals at our schools or allowing ride times of up to an hour, we are unable to reduce the fleet for the new school year.

- 6) Technology: can you discuss whether or not SHS infrastructure equipment (networking/switches etc) were properly considered in the budget (e.g., there is still a SHS switch included in costs). I understand that new equipment means new stuff to put into the obsolesce math but it should push them out significantly reducing the need expenses to smooth the costs over the years.**

The infrastructure at Sandy Hook will be comprised of the existing switches and access points currently in use at Chalk Hill plus additional devices to ensure complete coverage to meet the needs of the building. The statement in reference to Sandy Hook was included in the last answer to demonstrate that our technology deployment composition is still changing. Not only will we be adding devices at Sandy Hook but we will be expanding on the wireless in the other elementary schools as well.

The number arrived at as the proposed dollars amount for budget inclusion annually was based on what was known; the inventory at the time (October 2015). It cannot be assumed that the inventory will remain fixed going forward. Nor, with the rapid changes in technology, can what it will look like in the future be defined today.

Over the next few years we will need to work at replacing equipment so that our inventory fits an obsolescence guideline for many more types of devices, switch and access points included. In order to accomplish this, there may be items that are replaced before they reach full obsolescence and some that may be replaced after. Yes, some of the Sandy Hook devices will be new and therefore would not come due for replacement for some time. But their inclusion in the inventory will mean that the replacement of other devices will need to be redistributed to remain within the budgeted dollars.

BUSSING STATEMENT FORM PHIL CARROL

On Mon, Mar 21, 2016 at 11:05 PM, Phil <ppcarroll13@gmail.com> wrote:

Hi Paul here are the documents for the L.C. education committee minutes.

Hi Carey & Mary Ann, I am sending these documents to you also as I will bring them up at Wednesday nights meeting and would like them put in the minutes.

thanks to you all.....Phil

For those who are new to the boards, I was a school bus O/O for _17_ years. I was also a state certified school bus driver trainer, was on the O/O contract committee for 3 (?) contract negotiations. I have done routing. I also sat on several transportation committees including the committee making the recommendation to switch to 3 tiers when the Reed School opened.

I attended the Board Finance meeting on February 22 when the Board of Ed budget was discussed and Mr. Boland raised a very important point. With the continued drop in enrollment, he asked if the bus tiers/routes could be reconfigured to even the ridership and reduce the number of buses we use. At over \$65,000 per bus, the reduction could add up to significant savings.

We were on a four tier system until 2003 when the Reed School opened. Changing from 4 to 3 tiers did not change the number of hours driven per day. It remained the same because though one tier was eliminated, double drops were added, High School with Middle School and Reed with Hawley. We should be able to change to 4 tiers without additional hourly costs. It was done for decades.

Enrollment is projected to be 4,404 next year. The last time enrollment was at that number, it was the 1998-1999 school year when there were 24 full size buses and 9 mini buses on four tiers. Currently there are 42.5 full size buses and 8 mini buses; a difference of 18.5 buses or \$1.2 million.

With the Facilities Committee looking at the possibility of closing a school, the Shared Services Committee looking at services for cost savings and efficiencies, and the Board of Ed Curriculum & Instruction Sub-Committee discussing sleep deprivation and possible changes to school start times, the transportation piece of the puzzle, and it's potential savings, cannot and should not be ignored; especially when the transportation contract will be expiring next year.

I want to point out it has been stated several times that All-Star has "taken on" the responsibility of doing the bus routes. They are doing the routes because are required to by their contract. It also states in their contract they will work in revising ...to improve service, operating efficiencies or economy.

In 1993, after complaints to the Board of Ed on buses leaving the high school in the afternoon almost empty, it was decided to "overbook" the buses; meaning there were more students assigned to a bus than could legally be transported. This was based on the assumption that most juniors and seniors do not ride the bus. This practice was followed every year and I can count on one hand the number of

times a bus showed up at the high school during an emergencyie early dismissal for snow.....and a bus had too many students. There was always a spare bus and driver on standby during these situations and it was easily handled. All-Star is required by contract to have spare buses and drivers; they could just as easily handle this type of situation.

State law requires we provide a seat for any student who wants to ride. The district is not required to provide a seat for students who do NOT want to ride.

ALSO SEE ATTACHMENT: Bus Info.pdf