

MANCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION
BUDGET WORKSHOP

Wednesday, January 10, 2018

6:00 p.m.

Manchester High School – Room 293

PRESENT: Conyers, Hagenow, Maio, Meggers, Pattacini, Scappaticci, Thames

ALSO PRESENT: Superintendent of Schools Geary, Deputy Superintendent & Special Services Radikas, Director of Finance & Management Clancy

ABSENT: Leon, Stefanovicz

A. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:07 p.m. by Darryl Thames, co-chair of the Personnel & Finance Committee.

B. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

All in attendance participated in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag, led by Mr. Thames.

C. OPENING REMARKS

Mr. Thames reviewed that tonight is a meeting of the Personnel & Finance Committee held in a budget workshop fashion. Mr. Thames chairs the Personnel & Finance Committee and Ms. Hagenow is the Co-Chair. This evening is an opportunity for Board members to ask questions about the budget and hear answers to some previously asked questions. The budget was presented at a Board meeting on January 8th and a brief synopsis will be given again this evening. Mr. Thames reviewed that as elected officials the Board has three primary responsibilities, 1) to hire the Superintendent; 2) to evaluate the Superintendent; and 3) to set a budget for the school system.

D. SUPERINTENDENT'S BUDGET PRESENTATION QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Mr. Geary reviewed his proposed budget of \$116,650,479, which is a 4.4% increase (\$4,920,252) over the current budget. Mr. Geary again reviewed the health insurance holiday that will occur for one pay period in December, that will provide a \$750,000 increase to the available funds, making the actual budget increase requested from the town \$115,900,479, which is a 3.7% increase.

Mr. Geary hopes to have the excess cost numbers for tuition by next week as well as more grant information to be able to reduce the numbers by a little.

Monday, Ms. Hagenow had asked for details regarding the "other purchased services" line. Mr. Geary provided these details, along with details in the "contracted services" and "other professional services" lines. These detailed lists are available for viewing on the website.

Mr. Pattacini wondered how many SROs (School Resource Officers) are funded by the \$240,259. Mr. Geary explained that there are 2 SROs at MHS, 1 who splits his time between Bentley and MRA, and 1 at Illing, along with 1 Supervisor who is at the high school. The Board pays for half their salaries and the town pays the other half. Mr. Thames noted that in the past the State Department of Education contributed to the cost of SROs, but Mr. Geary stated that they no longer do that.

Ms. Hagenow wondered why some of the items in the lists this evening are not under Special Education. Mr. Geary clarified that they are, but these lines are sub-categories of that department.

Mr. Thames noted, while Mr. Geary was dealing with technical difficulties, that this is the first of three budget workshops. The next is next Wednesday, January 17 and then January 24th. All are held at MHS in Rm 293 at 6:00 p.m.

Mr. Geary clarified the budget freeze currently in effect. He noted in August part of the budget (\$1,450,000) was frozen due to uncertainty with the Alliance Grant and State funding. Once the state budget was confirmed in November, some of those funds were unfrozen (about \$350,000). Earlier this month, however, due to a deficit in the transportation and tuition lines, almost the entire budget was frozen, with only necessary expenses being approved. Mr. Geary noted that the Capital Projects line was not frozen because it was funded so tight and there is only about \$350,000 in that line that is needed.

The next question was around private tuition at outplacement facilities. Mr. Geary provided a list of facilities and their per pupil costs. Tuition at these 14 private placements, not including any transportation or other special services such as a paraprofessional, ranged from \$33,724 to \$77,775 per student, with most being in the mid \$60s to mid \$70s. Mr. Geary noted the number of students being outplaced remains relatively flat year to year, but a difference of just 2 or 3 children can mean a couple hundred thousand dollars.

Mr. Thames wondered what type of scenario leads to an outplacement in one of these facilities. Mr. Geary outlined several situations that may mean a student is not best served by remaining in district, including severe autism, significant behavioral issues, severe learning disabilities, or severe physical handicaps that present a safety issue or cannot be adequately supported in district. We do have many levels of support in the district, including in mainstream classes, district learning centers, and by providing nursing for medically fragile students. Mr. Geary reviewed that even when a child has been outplaced, we do look for ways to transition the child back into the district if possible.

Mr. Pattacini wondered about the difference in tuitions and if the district has a say in choosing a placement based on costs. Mr. Geary explained that the placement is made in the best interests of the student with input from the parents and other professionals involved in the case. Also, each of these outplacements addresses different needs, with some being medical, some behavioral, etc. Mr. Geary did state that if the district does not feel a particular placement favored by parents is not in the best interest of their child, they will push back and try to place the child where it is the best fit, not just where the parents are asking.

As far as magnet school information, Mr. Geary is still working on the numbers for next week, however he did not that from the 14/15 school year to the 17/18 school year tuition has increased by about \$220 to \$280 per student. He noted that funding from the state to magnets has dropped so in turn they have increased tuition.

A question was submitted asking whether it is possible that the Hartford Public School Magnets will start charging tuition. Mr. Geary stated he is surprised they have not yet begun to do so, but he has not heard of this being planned yet.

A question was submitted asking for the net increase in certified FTE (full time equivalent) positions. Mr. Geary reviewed that 5 positions are being reduced with the closure of Robertson and movement of grade 5 students. We then are adding 6 special education positions (4 to Bennet and 2 at MHS) due to the increase in needs in those schools. There is also a plan to add a Reading Consultant to Highland Park. That all plays out to a net increase of 2 FTE certified staff.

The future of Hartford Foundation for Public Giving funds was asked. Mr. Geary reviewed this is a January to December grant and the first year it was \$775,000. It was clear the funding would be phased out over about 5 years, though now it is looking at more like a 7 or 8 year phase out. This January to December the funding is \$576,000. Many items covered by this grant, including the FRC Coordinator position, will have to be moved to the Board budget or another funding source eventually. Mr. Geary noted that last spring the Hartford

Foundation helped with a sustainability process to help in moving positions to other funding sources.

Regarding capital projects possibly being funded in referendums, Mr. Geary reminded the Board that the parking lots at Illing and MHS were included in last November's referendum, so those will be set. It is possible to add projects to future referendums, such as the need to reimagine the library space at Illing, though that may mean not doing those projects for several years.

The volatility of the budget was asked. Mr. Geary noted that the tuition line is the most volatile aspect of the budget, along with the uncertainty in state funding.

Ms. Hagenow asked about how the repair of the recent water main break at MHS was funded. Mr. Geary noted that there are two lines that could pay that cost, depending on who does the work. Internal repairs can be funded through the Capital Repairs line and outside contractors can be paid through the Contracted Services line. The Town Water Department initially responded to the incident, but the actual repairs were performed by an outside contractor.

Mr. Pattacini wondered how many additional FTE's non-certified may be in the budget. Mr. Geary stated that is about even, noting an added behavior tech, but a reduction elsewhere.

Mr. Conyers asked for clarification on the health insurance holiday. Mr. Geary explained that there is a surplus in the TOMMIF fund that we have been advised can be reduced. Those funds must be used for health insurance purposes. In December those excess funds will cover one half month of expenses for both employees and the Board. The Board will not need to add the typical \$750,000 to the TOMMIF fund that month and employees will not have their medical deduction taken from one of their checks in December. This is a one time savings due to many years of overfunding this account.

Mr. Thames wondered how the variety of competitive grants we have been successful in achieving offset our budget. Mr. Geary will get those details for another workshop.

Mr. Thames asked about the elementary school snack program that was frozen then unfrozen and then refrozen. Mr. Geary noted that was one of the items we were unable to fund this year.

Ms. Hagenow recalled that Monday she heard tuition at magnets was rising, but attendance was dropping. Mr. Geary clarified that attendance at Hartford Public magnet schools was up, but other enrollment in magnets was about flat the last four years. Enrollment is projected to increase about 200 students over

the next 4 years. The hope Mr. Geary has is that about 100 students who we usually lose to magnets for grade 6 will love the school when they attend in grade 5 and elect to stay at Bennet.

Mr. Pattacini wondered what items in the now frozen budget will impact next year's budget. Mr. Geary noted that any capital repairs that have to be postponed will need to be funded. He explained some items, like Fountas & Pinnell kits, we wanted to give to each teacher. Instead Kindergarten teachers are sharing a kit at each school. With grant funding, we will likely give each grade level a kit to share.

Mr. Pattacini asked about the policy change regarding donation services such as "Go Fund Me". Mr. Geary noted that policy has not yet been changed and he has held off on submitting that change.

Mr. Geary recognizes that the increase he is suggesting in this budget proposal is substantial and it would be helpful for him to understand whether the Board of Education will support these numbers so he is asking for feedback on that. Mr. Geary presented a budget that addresses what he thinks we need in this district. He will be able to trim some numbers in the next week or so with the reduction in excess costs in the tuition line and clarification of some grants. He would like to present a budget to the Town that is fully supported by the Board of Ed.

Mr. Pattacini suggested that it would be helpful if Mr. Geary could indicate what changes would be suggested to be cut first and the impact those would have. Mr. Geary does not want to create mass panic in listing mass cuts at this time, however he can start prioritizing reductions. Mr. Pattacini feels it is the Board's responsibility to put forward a budget that we need and it is the Town's responsibility to say what the Town can afford. He hopes we get broad support for the decision. He noted in the past we have gotten less than we have needed and we are not able to do things necessary to move the district forward. He is comfortable with the suggested budget as it is. Mr. Pattacini notes that it is a requirement for an annual joint meeting with the Board of Directors and he wondered if we should hold such a meeting regarding this budget earlier rather than later.

Ms. Maio feels this current budget request is a result of the lack of support in our budget last year. People want better test scores and better results, but they don't want to properly fund the Board budget. She is comfortable with the proposed budget as is and does not want to see any cuts.

Mr. Scappaticci noted this 3.7% increase is the largest increase he has seen since he joined the Board about 6 years ago and he is in favor of it. He noted that last year was the lowest increase the Board has received in his years and it was a blow to our system. In order for changes to be made they have to be

funded. Mr. Scappaticci recalls many years ago, before his time on the Board, there was a 0% increase in the Board budget and some Directors (no longer active) were proud of that. He recalls that the flat budget impacted salaries and the ability to attract new teachers. It was not a good thing to be proud of. Mr. Scappaticci feels this is a budget we need to do very important work. He noted that if we want property values to be maintained or to rise we need to properly fund our schools. He noted friends in West Hartford know that each year their taxes are going to go up, in good part because their schools are properly funded.

Ms. Hagenow noted that over the years she has seen tight budgets but in reality salaries, health insurance costs, and tuition all will increase. If we had to keep our budget flat we would need significant cuts and that would hurt our children. She doesn't see how we could make cuts.

Mr. Thames feels this budget proposal is thoughtful and looks beyond next year. It puts the right people in the right place with the right resources. When the Board hired Mr. Geary he was challenged to bring our schools to the next level and we have to challenge ourselves to create a fiscally responsible, student-centered budget. Many costs are not in our control. We should follow the recommendations in this budget proposal in order to move our district forward.

E. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Tom Stringfellow, 183 Hillstown Road, noted he attended the State Board of Education meeting last week. He suggested a book, *White Folks Who Teach in the Hood*. Mr. Stringfellow notes we should make all students feel welcomed and it is vital to talk about equity. Mr. Stringfellow mentioned digital racism and cyber bullying. He wondered if Kelly subs are adequately trained in equity and dealing with various issues, especially when they are in a position long-term. Mr. Stringfellow mentioned MCC and their program, along with Excursions in Learning. He noted that students with disabilities are unique with talents to offer. Mr. Stringfellow feels we are on the right path.

F. CLOSING COMMENTS

Mr. Thames thanked the Superintendent for his presentation and his responsiveness to questions, along with the time it has taken to develop this budget proposal. He hopes the Board members leave and look at the budget and think of any questions they have for next week's workshop that they need clarity on to eliminate any issues they may have in supporting this budget. To the viewers, Mr. Thames reminded them their thoughts and concerns are welcome and they can attend the workshops and express their thoughts and concerns to the Board. Even though questions from the public will not be addressed at the meeting, they can ask questions and their feedback will be considered. This budget will help achieve better outcomes for our children. Mr. Thames reminded us that the next two budget workshops will be held at MHS, Room 293 on January 17 and 24th at 6:00 p.m. All are welcome.

G. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 7:19 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Darryl Thames,
Board Secretary