

BUDGET MEETING OF THE GREENWICH BOARD OF EDUCATION

TIME: November 28, 2006, 7:00 p.m.

PLACE: Cos Cob School

PRESENT:

Board: Mrs. Colleen Giambo, Chairman
Ms. Virginia Gwynn, Vice Chairman
Mrs. Leslie B. Moriarty, Secretary
Mr. Steven B. Anderson
Dr. Susan Ellis
Mr. William G. Kelly
Mrs. Nancy Weissler

Absent: Mr. Michael C. Bodson

Administration:

Dr. Betty Sternberg, Superintendent of Schools
Mrs. Mary Capwell, Deputy Superintendent
Mr. John P. Curtin, Assistant Superintendent
Ms. Mary P. Forde, Director, Pupil Personnel Services
Dr. Ellen Flanagan, Director of Human Resources
Dr. Susan Wallerstein, Asst. Superintendent, Business Services
Mr. Tony Byrne, Director of Facilities
Ms. Kim Eves, Director of Communications
Mr. Richard Calcavecchio, Director of Budget and Systems

Other: Mrs. Janice Richards, President, Mrs. MJ Foti, Mrs. Nancy Chapin, Mrs. Ashley Carihfield, Mrs. Julie Faryniarz, PTA Council; Mrs. Debbie Appelbaum, Mrs. Marjorie Stone Rodriguez, Greenwich High School; Mrs. Helen LaSorsa, Mrs. Ann Kraft-Biederman, Mrs. Jean Field, Mrs. Michelle Common, Mrs. Wendy Sangston, Mrs. Catherine Parker, Mr. William Noble, Mrs. Mandy Murphy, Mrs. Jeannie Intrieri, Mrs. Cathy Farricker, Mrs. Heather Servidio, Cos Cob School; Mrs. Frances Avery, New Lebanon School; Mr. Larry Simon, Mr. Steven Walko, Mr. Bill Finger, Mr. Peter Tesei, BET; Mrs. Genny Krob; Mrs. Lisa Harkness, Mrs. Alicia Budkins, Mr. Carl Marinaccio, Mrs. Donna Curtis, Mrs. Sue Rogers, Mrs. Celia Fernandez, Glenville School; other community members and various members of the Press. An attendance list is on file in the Superintendent's Office.

The meeting was called to order by Mrs. Giambo, Chairman, at 7:00 p.m.

PUBLIC HEARING

MOTION: It was moved by Ms. Gwynn and seconded by Mrs. Weissler to limit the time for speakers to two minutes each.

VOTE: 6 in favor, none opposed **MOTION CARRIED**
(Mr. Kelly not yet arrived)

The following people spoke at the public hearing:

Mrs. Janice Richards, PTA Council President, expressed an interest in the Board deliberations especially since the proposed budget exceeds the BET guidelines yet does not include many worthwhile initiatives.

Mrs. Helen LaSorsa, President, Cos Cob PTA, expressed PTA support for reduction in the class size caps for grades K and 1 and grades 4 and 5. She indicated that a petition signed by 75% of the Cos Cob families support this initiative. She also indicated that the Cos Cob PTA believes an extra section of 5th grade should be added to Cos Cob next year to compensate for the need for additional academic support for this group of students. She asked the members of the public who support the lowering of class size caps to stand for the Board (an overwhelming number of the audience stood).

Mrs. Jean Marie Field, parent at Cos Cob School, spoke in support of lower class size caps.

Mrs. Ann Kraft, parent at Cos Cob School, spoke in support of lower class size caps.

Mrs. Frances Avery, President of New Lebanon PTA, spoke in favor of moving forward the timing of the New Lebanon School field project, which is currently in the capital budget for 2009-2010.

Mrs. Marjorie Stone Rodriguez and Mrs. Debbie Appelbaum, Co-Presidents, Greenwich High School, spoke in support of increased resources at the high school to rectify lower per pupil allocations in previous years. They support the utilization of the extra resources to lower class sizes to a maximum of 26 students and to have some guidance staff coverage during the summer months to handle scheduling issues, college admissions questions and other concerns.

Mrs. Lisa Harkness, Co-President, Glenville PTA, spoke in support of lower class size caps.

Mrs. Lisa Beth Savitz and Mrs. Nancy Chapin, Chairmen, PTA Council ALP Committee, spoke about the initiative to review the ALP program. They indicated their support for the goal of raising the bar for all children and will listen and participate with an open mind. However, they indicated the continuing need for special services for high ability students and a concern that the underlying goal of the study is to reduce resources in this program. The

Committee noted that its goals for the past year to expand the second grade program to a 5 day pull out model and to improve the middle school science ALP program are not included in the proposed budget.

Mr. Tim Murphy, parent at Cos Cob, spoke in support of lower class size caps.

Mr. William Noble, parent at Cos Cob, spoke in support of lower class size caps.

Mr. Tom Conelias spoke in support of the Hamilton Avenue magnet school. He requested Board support of the proposal, especially the preschool program, to achieve the goal of closing the achievement gap.

Mrs. MJ Foti, PTA Council, spoke in support of lower class size caps.

FURTHER DISCUSSION OF SUPERINTENDENT'S 2007-2008 BUDGET

Dr. Sternberg presented additional budget information identifying reallocation opportunities to fund the initiatives supported by the Board that were not included in the initial budget proposal – lowering elementary class size caps, lowering high school class sizes, funding assured experiences and honor choir, funding Social Emotional Learning through alternate sources; laptop initiative at a lower cost. Dr. Sternberg also discussed benchmarking data presented in previous years. She indicated that a Administrative Study is being conducted to review the use of resources at the staff level, which may indicate opportunities for more effective utilization of staff.

The Board and Administration discussed the following points. After the initial set of comments on the revised budget proposal, the discussion was grouped into categories:

- In response to a question about the certified staffing model, Dr. Wallerstein indicated that the staff additions included in the budget proposal still keeps the district within the 10:1 ratio since it has operated at higher ratio in recent years.
- In response to a question about the laptop initiative, Dr. Sternberg indicated that the pilot would compare sixth grade achievement levels of students with laptops to students of similar achievement levels before the pilot without laptops. It was indicated that this program requires significant staff development in order to maximize effectiveness of program. Nationally, this initiative has seen improvements in performance, especially writing. If the pilot was judged to be successful, the plan would be to expand it to all middle school students over time. A student would keep the same laptop for their 3-year middle school career. Volume pricing, which includes insurance, would be negotiated to lower the cost from the initial approximately \$1,000 per student.

- In response to a question about facilities maintenance, Dr. Wallerstein indicated that the level of facilities maintenance would be able to be maintained with a lower allocation.
- In response to a question about assured experiences, Dr. Wallerstein indicated that an identified, curriculum-related event would be co-sponsored with the PTAs to ensure that all students were able to participate. The lower budget request is reflective of continued co-sponsorship with PTAs rather than the District absorbing 100% of the cost.
- In response to a question about small class sizes at the high school, Mr. Curtin indicated that the current minimum is 12 students. Only a few classes are lower than that number and they are due to special circumstances – higher level specialized courses which attract fewer students and some sections of more popular courses that are needed for scheduling conflicts. There was additional discussion about the process to review courses to be phased out as enrollment and interest decline. Dr. Sternberg indicated that annual reviews will be continued but that there are also other, more innovative ways to deliver a more obscure course; for example, online courses.
- Referring to the benchmarking data, it was indicated that the Board needs to evaluate the effectiveness of our programs and the delivery models.

Discussion on Salaries

- Referring to the salary budget, it was indicated that the Board needs to better understand the differences between the Administration's salary forecast and the projections used in the development of the BET guidelines. The Administration indicated that more information on these numbers should be available at the next budget meeting.
- In response to a question about the assumptions for the salary savings, the Administration indicated that this area was not budgeted too conservatively. This area is highly volatile with projections involving expected retirements, leaves and resignations; yet this has a tremendous impact on the budget.
- In response to a question about supplemental programs, it was indicated that the primary increase in the salaries for supplemental programs is the scope of the Summer School program. The budget includes free tuition for students on free or reduced lunch who scored below proficiency on the CMTs. This is a change from the 2006 program that offered free tuition for students on free or reduced lunch who scored below goal on the CMTs. It should also be noted that the costs for the 2006 Summer School program were covered by the surplus in the revolving account. There are no funds remaining in that account to cover costs in excess of revenue for the Summer School.
- It was asked what the cost would be to continue to offer the Summer School program at no cost to students on free or reduced lunch who scored below goal on the CMTs.
- Referring to the amount of release time included in the budget, it was suggested that the increase in professional development may justify changing the number of days with students in session from 182 to 181 and freeing up staff to benefit from an

additional day for training. It was requested that the Administration look at this proposal. Dr. Sternberg did indicate that some of the release time is for classroom observations which are important development opportunities. Dr. Wallerstein also indicated that the total cost of release time equates to 1 day per certified staff member per year

Discussion on Facilities Utilization/Racial Balance issues

- There was a question about the enrollment projections of the Hamilton Avenue catchment and the number of seats available for magnet students. It was indicated that the projections for the Hamilton Avenue students are about 45 students for each 4 year old preschool, kindergarten and first grade. This would leave about 15 seats for magnet students. A modification would be if preschool were to be open to both 3 and 4 year olds; then there would be space constraints.
- The point was made that a class size cap of 15 on kindergarten and first grade could require the District to add a section if a 16th student enrolled, resulting in class sizes of 12 which is an expensive outcome that also results in a very large disparity compared to the other schools. A Board member indicated favoring a slightly higher cap, like 17, to avoid this situation.
- In response to a question about the additional music teacher for the Suzuki program, it was indicated that this staff member would have additional responsibilities in overseeing the arts partnerships.
- In response to a question about the parental component in a pure Suzuki model, Mrs. Capwell indicated that they would like to implement as pure a model as possible, but it can be modified as needed. She indicated that 90% of the Hamilton Avenue students played a musical instrument in 5th grade, yet there is no representation in the high school band from this school.
- It was noted that the Educational Specifications for the Hamilton Avenue School were approved with both preschool and lower class sizes in K and 1 as a strategy to close the achievement gap.
- A question was asked about the process and the research used to develop the magnet theme. Mrs. Capwell indicated that the committee has been working for about a year to develop the magnet elements. Dr. Sternberg added that arts programs have been successful magnet schools around the state.
- In response to a question, it was noted that the cost for the extended time for the preschool classes (until 3:30) is included in the budget proposal. It is assumed that additional extended hours (until 5:30) would need to be covered by community agencies.

Additional questions

- It was noted that the reallocation proposal is reducing the scope of the work for next year.
- It was clarified that the plan is to co-locate the Arch program and the CLP program; however the programs will continue to have some separate elements.

- It was noted that there was significant differences in the presentation of the principal's requests. In response to a question about the equity of the allocation, Mrs. Capwell indicated that she worked carefully with each Principal and confirmed the allocations.
- It was noted that there is an opportunity to provide a little more context and standardization to the narratives to help understand each individual school's budget.

In closing, Mrs. Giambo indicated that the Board needs to better understand the differences between the assumptions in the proposed budget and the BET guidelines. This information will help the Board as it identifies its priorities and evaluates the Superintendent's reallocation proposals. The next budget discussion will occur at the Board's December 7th Work Session during which there will be another public hearing. The deadline for additional questions about the budget is Thursday, November 30th.

MEETING DEBRIEF

The Board thanked the staff for the responses.

Upon motion duly made by Dr. Ellis and seconded by Mr. Anderson, the meeting moved into Executive Session at 9:10 p.m. to discuss negotiations.

Upon motion duly made and seconded, the meeting moved back into Public Session at 9:30 p.m.

Upon motion duly made by Mr. Kelly and seconded by Ms. Gwynn, the meeting was adjourned at 9:31 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Leslie B. Moriarty
Secretary