

GREENWICH BOARD OF EDUCATION
GREENWICH PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Greenwich, CT

Board of Education Meeting Agenda Document Cover Sheet

Information Only _____
Action Requested _____

Meeting Date: December 8, 2016

Agenda Item Subject: Addendum: 2017-18 Budget Q&A Round II

Submitted by: Salvatore Corda, Superintendent

Document Summary/Purpose and/or Recommended Action [If applicable]:

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Greenwich Public Schools



MEMORANDUM

To: Board of Education

From: Sal Corda

Re: Information about Special Education

The Sunday edition of the Greenwich Time ran a front page article indicating concerns about the providing of Special Education services in 2017-2018 based on the budget proposal. Although we received many of the questions from Board members about the Special Education budget, and these responses have been shared with you, I thought it might be helpful to provide information in a separate memorandum as well as share information about the contents of the article.

I want to reinforce what I said at the prior budget meeting as well as what I said in the monthly radio program I participate in on WGCH: The budget does not diminish services to any student who needs them based on his/her IEP. We are required by law to provide these services and we will meet our obligation. Because Special Education needs change from one year to the next, we adjust our level of staffing to provide services based on need. For next year, we can reduce our staffing as recommended in the budget. In succeeding years, you may see a request for additional staff. I also shared this information with PTAC on Dec. 2 and Mary Forde shared the same information and responded to questions today at the Educational Differences Sub-Committee meeting where, she believed, parental concerns were addressed

I cannot respond to the concerns raised by anonymous parents. I have no idea who may have said what and what specifically is the nature of the concern. I am also at a loss to comment about alleged retaliation. This has never been brought to my attention or to Mary Forde. I can only reiterate what we said in the article and I said today in the radio broadcast. If any parent has a concern that has not been met, I can only encourage them to contact Mary Forde or me to voice that concern and we will immediately follow up on it.

Settlements are also not evidence of dissatisfaction with the available services. Our responsibility under the law is to provide an appropriate education in the least restrictive environment. That is viewed, under the law, to the extent possible that services be provided in the school district. When there is an honest difference of opinion about whether or not we can serve the child in the district, the parent has the right to seek an impartial hearing. Rather than pursuing that course of action, many times the parties will agree to a compromise—a settlement where the parent is agreeable to the terms and comfortable that the child is being properly served.

The article stated that we would be cutting paraprofessionals next year. Professional assistants are allocated each year based on student need. As with the Teacher allocation, GHS has a slight

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increase in number to accommodate scheduling. No positions were cut although from year to year, a school may have a different number of PAs based on the student population. The number of PAs will also change if the school decides to EVOLVE. The number of PAs across all schools is 172.8, the same as in 2015-2016. The article is simply wrong in this statement.

Our budget was developed by examining carefully our current student population, their needs, past history of expenditures, and trends that might give us an indication of the scope of unknown costs. We have recommended the appropriations based on a considered judgment taking these variables into account.

I also understand the concern expressed about a potential reduction in Excess Cost Sharing. To enhance understanding, please note that the Excess Cost-Student Based grant provides state support for special education placements and selected regular education placements. The initial threshold for which a student is eligible for the Excess Cost grant is referred to as the "basic contributions". For placements initiated by a state agency, e.g., the Department of Children and Families, the basic contribution (or local share) is equal to the prior year's NCEP. For local placements or students educated within the district the basic contribution is equal to the prior year's NCEP x 4.5. Certain state agency placements are subject to 100 percent state funding. The Excess Cost grant is computed twice during the year: February and May. For the February calculation, the prior year's NCE and ADM are still unaudited. This information is updated for the May calculation.

The special education excess cost grant reimburses school districts for (1) the reasonable costs of special education for a student who lives in the district that exceed 4.5 times the district's average per pupil expenditures for the preceding year (CGS § 10-76g (b) (2) (B)) and (2) 100% of the cost of special education for any student placed in the district by a state agency and who has no identifiable home district in the state (§ 10-76g (a) (2)). Reimbursable costs include those for special education instructional personnel, equipment and materials, tuition, transportation, rent for space or equipment, and consultant services, all as defined in § 10-76f. The grant does not reimburse districts for regular education costs attributable to a special education student.

The Educational Cost Sharing or ECS formula is intended to equalize state education funding to towns by taking into account a town's wealth and ability to raise property taxes to pay for education. Poor towns receive more aid per student; affluent towns receive less aid per student. The basic ECS formula multiplies the number of students in each school district (weighted for educational need) by the amount the state has determined a district should spend to provide an adequate education (the "foundation") and by an aid percentage determined by the district's wealth. The result is the district's ECS grant. The law then imposes minimum or base aid for all towns and adds supplements for such things as students attending regional school districts. Note we meet these requirements.

The most important understanding about the aid from these formulae is that the aid does not come to the school district but goes to the Town. It does not affect our budget.