

## Responses to RTM Education Committee Questions

### **Q 1a – May we have an itemized list of the educational programs that our District subsidized for the disabled and special education students who were served outside of our District?**

#### Area Cooperative Educational Services

- The Village School
- Whitney High School East/West
- Center for Autism and Developmental Disorders

Boys and Girls Village School	Cooperative Educational Services (Therapeutic Day School)
Connecticut Center for Child Development	Discovery Ranch
Eagle Hill	Easton Country Day + Private Behavioral services
Foundation School	Gateway Academy
Germaine Lawrence	Giant Steps
Grove School	The Hampshire Country School
Hope Academy	Innovation Education
Klingberg Family Center	The May Institute
Maplebrook Academy	Meliora Academy
The New England Center for Children	The Spire School
Villa Maria	Wellspring Foundation
Winston Prep	The Wheeler Clinic
Woodhouse Academy	The Cedarhurst School

These schools provide small, structured environments with specific services (therapeutic, behavioral, etc.) provided by highly trained and specialized staff. Please see the response to the “nature of psychiatric and behavior” issues question submitted by RTM member Ellen Jacob for a fuller description of services offered at the above schools. Often services include consultation with physicians and doctoral level clinical staff.

### **Q 1b - This, of course, would not include names or details of personal plans, but would let us know what types of services we were purchasing, what the average amount spent on each student happened to be, what was the least spent on an individual and what was the largest amount spent on an individual student.**

Full year GROSS tuition costs per student this year range from \$59,785 to \$361,899. The NET cost per student for services this year ranges from \$59,785 to \$145,828. The cost to the Fairfield Public Schools is decreased by the Excess Cost Provision. This provision allows for CT school districts to be reimbursed for individual student costs that exceed 4.5 times the per pupil expenditure of the district (for Fairfield that equates to \$67,086 for the 13/14 school year). Once a student’s educational costs exceed this figure, the district receives reimbursement at the current rate of 80%. For example, the student whose tuition is \$361,899 in actuality costs the Fairfield Public Schools \$145,828. The average cost per student in 2013-14 is estimated to be \$74,000. Please note that an individual student’s tuition is based on the total number of days they are enrolled. Students are enrolled and dis-enrolled throughout the year and their tuition is prorated accordingly. Tuitions are also variable based on the unique needs of the student.

**Q 1c - Are other Districts providing the same complexity of services?**

All Connecticut school districts function under the same state and federal statutes and must provide a “free and appropriate public education” to students with disabilities even when the nature and extent of the disability requires a more restrictive placement outside the district. The schools and facilities listed above all have students in them who are funded by their school districts.

**Q 1d - Is the \$1,800,000 that we spent most likely to increase dramatically in this area as you view our District’s future?**

Given that tuition to these facilities increases by 5-10% annually and there is a trend toward more students needing these types of services, I would expect that there will be increases in this line item each year. We would remind RTM members that this is, and always has been, a volatile account and predictions are very hard to make.

**Q 2 – As we look at the number of positions in our District that have salaries exceeding \$100,000 (exclusive of the whole package of benefits), will we ever be able to have you and the Board of Education show a willingness to consolidate some administrative positions and make some cuts (whether through the design of half-time or shared positions, or perhaps through early retirement packages and combining of jobs)? Creating more innovative and cost-effective ways of combining tasks and utilizing fewer administrators, curriculum coordinators, or the highest paid school librarians would not have to be a detriment to the quality of our educational system and value that each child receives within it.**

- Actually the Fairfield Public Schools has consolidated administrative positions and found more innovative and cost-effective ways of combining tasks over the years, as highlighted in the Power Point presentation made to the Board of Finance and Board of Selectman on 3/6/14. For example:
  - The average annual budget increase over the past five years has been 1.6%, lower than the contracted salary and benefit increases.
  - Over the past ten years the FPS’s ranking in wealth has remained between 16<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>, while per pupil expenditures have declined from 23<sup>rd</sup> to 62<sup>nd</sup> in the state.
  - Over the past ten years:
    - Student enrollment has grown 17.5% while staff has only grown 4.4%
    - Teaching staff has grown to match rising enrollment, while non-certified staff has DECLINED 9.6%.
    - The number of administrators has stayed flat and we have the third lowest ratio of administrators to teachers and to students in Southern Fairfield County, a frequently used measure of efficiency. (About 17% below average.)
  - Over the past five years, the FPS budget has increased an average 1.61%, which is below the general Inflation Rate of 1.76% and is well below the BLS rate of inflation for educational goods and services which was an average of 4.12%.
  - If the budget, as recommended by the Board of Finance is approved at \$ 156,218,051 the six year average increase would be 1.90 %.
  - Fairfield had the lowest increase in per pupil expenditures in Southern Fairfield County from 2007 to 2012. As shown in the Power Point presentation: By example:
    - Fairfield has increased only \$ 624 PPE, or .90%
    - Greenwich has increased \$ 993 PPE or 1.17%
    - Trumbull has increased \$ 1,524, or 2.65%

- Westport has increased \$ 1,933, or 2.46%
    - Other school districts have higher per pupil expenditures than Fairfield including Windham, Woodbridge, Milford, Hamden and Branford to name a few.
  - We deliver a high quality school system with the second lowest per pupil expenditures in Southern Fairfield County, 16% below average.
- Given the increasing concern for the health and welfare of our students, and as incidents of violence continue on school property, the Fairfield Public Schools believes the number of guidance counselors, school psychologists, social workers and housemasters are needed to ensure the proper operation of our school system; the creation of a Safe School Climate; and the implementation of new mandated services to reduce the incidents of bullying and address varying degrees of student stress.
- Educational reform and new state mandates have created three specific challenges for the Fairfield Public Schools, and all school districts: (1) implementing the new teacher and administrator evaluation systems, (2) implementing the new Common Core State Standards and (3) implementing new, more rigorous statewide assessments with higher stakes. These are all being done without a request for increased administrative support. In addition, the rising issues of addressing school security, combating school bullying, implementing the affordable care act and implementing mandated individual Student Success Plans, all require that we maintain our existing system of housemasters and curriculum leaders; they are central to implementing the above mentioned required activities.

**Q 3 – How well do you think Fairfield is doing in education? There is a lot of discussion of our performance relative to DRG B, DRG A, Southern Fairfield County, etc. What are the top five performance metrics you use to manage the school system, and can you share the history and recent numbers?**

- As shown in this historical view of the district’s performance on standardized test scores, we have shown steady improvement over the past 7 years on the three most commonly-used measures, CMT, CAPT and AP. (CMT/CAPT/AP data posted at [http://fairfieldschools.org/curriculum\\_district\\_testing.htm](http://fairfieldschools.org/curriculum_district_testing.htm)) While there is year to year variation the general trend over time is upward, and in some cases, significantly upward. While overall achievement is strong, we have concerns about our “achievement gap,” as displayed in the PowerPoint you will see Wednesday night. We also see improvement in the number of students achieving at the “advanced” level on CMT over time. We also see a decline in students performing at the lowest levels, a positive development.
- Our district faces challenges in student achievement for English Language Learners and Free/Reduced Lunch Eligible students that many neighboring districts do not. Our AP scores show a steady trend upward in terms of number of students taking the test and the number scoring at 3 or above.
- In addition, many important qualities of a highly regarded school system are not captured in standardized test scores. Providing a comprehensive, instructional and co-curricular program that is competitive with our neighboring districts is very important, and I believe we do that. Participation in sports, clubs and the arts is also an important measure of success (see Powerpoint for details).
- On the financial side, the most common “metric” is per pupil expenditures. The historical data for this measure is in the budget book on page 6. In addition, we look at the number of administrators per student and the number of administrators per teacher. This information is in the budget book on page 9 and shows we are among the most efficient on this measure in Southern Fairfield County.

**Q 4 – We had an interesting discussion at the last RTM meeting around moving certain unions to defined contribution as opposed to pension. I believe this was for two unions representing 32 employees, and it was for the new hires. What is the total number of Education employees, and how many are on pension versus defined contribution? What are the plans going forward around defined contribution?**

- As reflected on page 139 of our 2014-15 budget manual, the FPS has 1,443.6 FTE's proposed in our budget.
  - 1,005 are certified staff and covered under a state run and funded pension plan. No town dollars are spent.
  - Of the remaining 438 FTE positions, 405 are currently covered by town funded and managed pension plans.
- Two of the five unions that represent employees covered by town pension plans have agreed to convert to a defined contribution pension plan, representing 32 employees.
- Three bargaining units are still in negotiation that cover a total of 372 staff.
- The BoE has consistently represented the stated interest of the town to convert to a defined contribution pension plan and will continue to do so.

**Q 5 – I have received a lot of emails from people in the town, and also from people involved with Fairfield Taxpayer, concerned about Affordability. How do you look at Affordability, particularly when you seem to compare our spending against more expensive districts (DRG A) but our performance against the state averages?**

- As mentioned in a prior answer, the State of Connecticut defines wealth as the Adjusted Equalized Net Grand List per capita (AENGLC). The ranking is determined using a combination of property tax base and income per person. Towns are ranked from 1 (highest) to 169 (lowest) for both Per Pupil Expenditures (PPE) and AENGLC.
- As shown in our Power Point presentation, Fairfield has ranked between 17<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> in terms of wealth over the past five years, while the rank in per pupil expenditures has dropped consistently from 29<sup>th</sup> to 62<sup>nd</sup>.
- Spending is a function of geography – Fairfield County is more expensive than the rest of the state. We compare to DRG B because test scores are highly correlated with socio-economic status. DRG B communities located outside of Fairfield County have lower salary structures, so their overall costs will be lower.

**Q 6 – Governor Molloy has indicated that he may delay implementation of Common Core. What are your thoughts on this?**

- To our knowledge Governor Malloy remains a supporter of the Common Core State Standards. He and 45 other Governors across the country independently and voluntarily chose to adopt Common Core. The State Board of Education adopted these standards in 2010 and included this decision in its request for a waiver from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. I believe the BoE's position is that implementation of the Common Core is a state initiative and thus Fairfield will implement it.
- In a recent survey of CT teachers, 73% supported the Common Core and agree that it will make a positive difference for most students. The Common Core State Standards raise expectations for all students to the same high level.
- The Fairfield Public School District remains in conformance with state statutes and regulations, and thus Common Core is the "law of the land." FPS is implementing Common Core into our curriculum as each academic area's curriculum is reviewed and revised. Please see page 149 of the 2014-15 budget book for

the curriculum review calendar/schedule, as included in the Board of Education budget submission of January 30, 2014.

**Q 7 – How is Fairfield in terms of technology? I know that Fairfield Prep is implementing iPads, which will help not only with scoring tests, but also evaluating the success of teachers and implementing low cost educational solutions. As the standards are increased for teacher reviews, have you looked at IT solutions to manage this?**

Please refer to page 154 of the budget book which contains the technology department narrative. The first two paragraphs specifically address the acquisition of equipment to support both instruction and assessment.

**Q 8 – How do you feel about Public/Private partnerships? For example, utilizing Fairfield University or Sacred Heart to send students for certain AP classes where they will get college credit. My understanding is that Fairfield does not track how many students who take AP classes subsequently get credit for those classes when they attend college?**

- Fairfield Public Schools has an arrangement with the University of Connecticut that provides college credit for 8 courses. The enrollment for these courses is about 120 annually and these students are eligible to receive college credit.
- FPS School counselors distribute the required form to secure UCONN credits, which are then transferred to the student's individual college of choice.
- This information could only be obtained by voluntary reporting by individual students; they are not required to inform us of their final college choices; colleges are prevented by FERPA from disclosing student information.
- The Guidance office at each high school mails applications out to any student taking a course here that is UCONN ECE (Early College Experience) eligible. Students need to complete an application to register with UCONN and pay \$25 per credit for the courses. It is optional. The teachers must be certified by UCONN to be eligible. Students receive credits and a transcript from UCONN—not all colleges accept these as transfer credits but most do. Only universities can award college credit; our high schools provide opportunities for students to obtain college credit awarded by universities.
- A number of years ago we initiated conversation with Fairfield University to develop a partnership for our students. It never really got off the ground on their end.
- Sacred Heart and Fairfield University do not award Advanced Placement Credit nor do they use the established curriculum of the College Board. We have no way of knowing whether other universities will accept the transfer of credit from SHU or FU, but we do have a sense of where AP credit is honored. Our courses that are designated as Advanced Placement follow the College Board curriculum. Colleges and universities know what they are getting (what topics and skills are covered) when a student comes with AP credit, but they do not necessarily know what the curriculum is at SHU or FU.
- In addition, having students take classes at these schools will create disruptions. Very few of their courses will coincide with our schedule. They operate on a different calendar (i.e. their spring break is different, and therefore the families may not be able to take a vacation). Would students be expected to provide their own transportation to the campus?

**Q 9 – Can we get a copy of the budget in Excel?**

- The district has a long standing policy, followed by many corporations and government entities, of providing all records in a secure, searchable PDF format to protect the integrity of the information contained in documents.
- Our financial records are maintained in a system called MUNIS and we need to convert those records into a new format to deliver them. Converting the documents to a 'native' format such as Excel, could compromise the security and integrity of the records, in that the records could be easily altered and thereafter represented as original records.
- The FPS's practice with respect to the disclosure of electronic records is to disclose records only in a secured format.
- Section 1-211(a), G.S only provides a requester with the option to request a specific method of delivery, meaning paper, disks, tapes and electronic storage devices and does not, in any of its terms, obligate a public agency to provide a copy of a computer stored public record in the computer format, such as Excel or Word, as requested.
- The FPS believes in maintaining the integrity and security of its information and uses a consistent method of delivery for all documents. Thus, all documents are provided to our own Board of Education, other public agencies, and the general public in secure, searchable PDF format.