

DRAFT

FAIRFIELD BOARD OF EDUCATION
MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Tuesday, January 18, 2011

Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Board of Education held Tuesday, January 18, 2011, at 501 Kings Highway East, 2nd Floor Conference Room.

The meeting was called to order at 7:34 p.m. by Mr. John Mitola, Chairman. Other Board members present were: Mrs. Sue Brand, Mrs. Sue Dow, Mr. Paul Fattibene, Mrs. Pamela Iacono, Mr. Tim Kery, Mr. Perry Liu and Mrs. Catherine Albin (arrived 7:35 p.m.). Ms. Stacey Zahn was absent. Also in attendance were Superintendent Dr. David Title and members of the administrative staff. Approximately 50 people comprised the remainder of the audience.

1. Mr. Mitola led the Board and audience in the Pledge of Allegiance.
2. Presentation and Discussion of the Superintendent's Recommended 2011-2012 Budget Request

Dr. Title stated that this budget is very different in format from previous budgets. The goal was to simplify and clarify the budget document so it would be easier to follow and less redundant. The budget book contains a detailed budget by object and a less detailed budget by department. Dr. Title highlighted a number of changes that were made in the budget book this year: to be as clear as possible about the way grants are used; to clarify staffing and show which staff members are paid out of the operating budget, which staff members are paid out of grants or other revenue, and for the first time the permanent part-time hourly staff members have been included. This budget also tries to clarify that sometimes when funds are needed for additional positions it is because grant funding for those positions is ending as opposed to adding new employees; where possible multiple accounts used for purchasing the same item have been combined into one account; the impact of the SFSF dollars that are going back to the town and now have to be included in our budget; and a page has been included that identifies where we have responded to some of the suggestions from the operational audit. The way money is allocated to the schools versus central allocation has changed. The goal of that change is to provide equity among the schools in staffing resources and technology resources and to remove from the schools' responsibility items that are beyond their control such as substitute teachers and interns. All of the expenses for substitute teachers and interns have been moved out of the school budgets and into central control, and all technology is now being budgeted centrally, including software. We know there are inequities amongst the schools but just don't have the funds to remedy all of the inequities. A new model of elementary staffing has been developed based on the size of the school and the number of sections to try to standardize and provide a better model of instructional delivery at the elementary schools.

Dr. Title stated that his overall goal is to preserve the excellent instructional program, keep class sizes where they are and keep up with the increasing enrollment. He briefly reviewed the proposed 2011-12 budget. With enrollment declining at the elementary level and increasing at the middle and high school level, in order to keep class sizes and programs in place, some extra staff members are needed. The net new staff is about 6 and enrollment is increasing by about 80. There are a few program improvements that have a cost, the Gifted Program and the Elementary Staffing Plan, and some changes in the preschool program that have a savings and will also be educationally beneficial. The preschool proposal is to increase slots in the Burr program where there is space and staff, and where we don't have space at McKinley to merge that program with the ECC program. He stated that he would like to keep the forward momentum going in technology and try to restore some of the major cuts that were taken in the maintenance projects last year. There are some budget lines where we haven't budgeted realistically and run a deficit every year, and it was time to move that around. The biggest area where we have historically overspent is special education tuition. When you under-budget, you end up freezing money in other accounts, so why not put it where it should go. There is a proposal to move the high school start time back to 7:30 a.m. to save \$500,000 and trying to save money in the medical costs by increasing the stop loss from \$150,000 to \$300,000 which would save about \$450,000.

The budget book also includes a detailed explanation of the Food Service Program that is not part of our budget but gives an explanation about the fund balance in that program. The last section is the proposed town capital improvement projects.

The gross budget increase is 4.90% and subtracting out the SFSF funding, the net budget increase is 4.54%.

Approximately one hour and thirty minutes of Board questions, comments and discussion followed regarding retiree insurance and pension obligation; student transportation for summer school, Center for the Arts, and Six to Six; extra-curricular transportation and extra-curricular transportation support; moving the high school start time back to 7:30 a.m. and how it will save money in terms of transportation; the preschool program at Burr and McKinley and expanding the program to include 3 year olds; charging tuition for the preschool program; exploring other sites to house the ECC program in order to free up classroom space at Fairfield Warde HS; the proposed elementary staffing model; no change in the kindergarten program for next year with the exception being in the description of the elementary staffing model where there is a change in the way paraprofessionals are allocated to the elementary schools; how many of these budget items are out of our control, e.g., contract negotiations, medical benefits; savings related to recommendations from the audit; changes in budgeting the special education tuition; grant money; SFSF funds; staffing; stop loss; technology budget; high school students opting out of bus transportation; the continuing education program; charging community members for building rentals; Dwight bathrooms; major maintenance projects; town capital improvement projects; and \$150,000 for the Fairfield Woods MS and Stratfield Elementary School non-building committee items for educational programs.

Dr. Title commented on the preschool program. Currently there are two preschool programs. The preschool at Burr and McKinley are a half day program 5 days a week for 4 year olds, 10 students in the morning and 10 students in the afternoon, with no tuition charge, and transportation is provided. The other program is the Early Childhood Center program that is run at Fairfield Warde HS. This program is under-utilized by typical peers and has room to increase the number of non-special education children. McKinley does not have space to expand the pre-k program; it is currently in the room that was the teachers' lounge. It would benefit everyone involved to merge the McKinley program with the ECC program. There would continue to be no tuition for the special education children who are guaranteed a slot in that program, and non-special ed students, typical peers, would pay tuition on a sliding scale. It would be open to all residents, although it would be geographically convenient to McKinley families, and slots would be allocated to them since their program is essentially being merged. Dr. Title stated that he is recommending opening the pre-school program to 3 and 4 year olds and increasing the slots at Burr since there is space and staff. No tuition would be charged at Burr. By increasing the slots available at Burr it will also help with the racial imbalance because the more kids who go to preschool at Burr, the more likely they will be to stay at Burr which will help the racial imbalance.

First Selectman Ken Flatto commented that all of the revenue designated for specific purposes is what the district has primary responsibility to set and those monies go directly to the district. The Town general fund doesn't get the IDEA, Title I, or Special Excess Cost monies but the ECS and monies that go to the Town general fund are considered general money in good years and bad, and those amounts have never formally been allocated. There have been some years when those funds go up and some years when those funds go down. He stated that in his discussions with Fiscal Officer Hiller, their feeling is that it is going to be hard to assume an increase in the ECS to replace the ARRA money. He also stated that he believes the Board of Ed does charge and get reimbursed for custodian overtime expenses for all after school and evening meetings except for school related groups like scouts or PTAs. He commented that this will not be an easy budget process and that the number the Superintendent is recommending appears to be higher than 80-90% of the other Fairfield County districts. He stated that it might be helpful to include some comparable statistics per capita spending for some of our Fairfield County colleagues, Greenwich, Darien, to try to explain where we stand in that regard. The more information you can provide would be helpful. This is going to be a difficult budget year. Lastly, he asked for a 3-4 year history on some of the key non-personnel related issues, technology, maintenance, etc.

Mrs. Iacono stated that the teachers in a lot of the municipalities the First Selectman mentioned are taking a zero this year in their budget and that is why they were able to come in with numbers less than ours. She stated that she is not sure if the custodian statement is entirely accurate.

3. Mrs. Albin moved, seconded by Mrs. Dow that this meeting of the Board of Education adjourn at 9:32 p.m.

Motion carried: 8:0:0.