

Board of Education
Fairfield Public Schools
501 Kings Highway East
2nd Floor Board Conference Room
Thursday, January 24, 2013

Minutes of the Special Meeting

1. Pledge of Allegiance

Mr. Dwyer led the Board and audience in the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Call to Order and Roll Call

Mr. Dwyer called the Special Meeting to order at 7:35 p.m. Other members present were Mrs. Kennelly, Mr. Convertito (arrived 7:40 p.m.), Mr. Liu, Mrs. Gerber, Ms. Iacono, Mr. Fattibene, Mr. Kery, and Mrs. Brand. Dr. David Title, members of Central Office, and approximately 25 members of the public were also in attendance.

3. Discussion of the Superintendent's Recommended 2013-2014 Budget Request

Mr. Dwyer stated that he would like to focus on series 300-600. Mr. Dwyer went through each paper that was provided at the table for the Board to review. Dr. Title said all will be posted online, and any additional documents will be posted as well.

Mr. Kery stated that earlier today he had sent a copy of his affordability piece to the Board. He stated that other Boards will make the changes if this Board does not, and those changes may be more drastic. Mr. Kery stated that there is now an opportunity in the coming months and years with curriculum, and we must work within a budget framework. Each group has a constituency that says a program is important, so the Board should take a stepped approach and start by picking a number, Mr. Kery suggested 2 %, and figure out how many years it takes to get to that number so that there is time to plan. Based on common core, changes will be needed. Mr. Kery stated he is looking to have a conversation with other Board members to set some limits.

Mr. Fattibene agrees that at some point there will be a limit to what the Town will pay, and the Town will have to be serious about contract negotiations. Without a substantial increase in cost share, you won't be able to meet the limits without cutting something for the kids. Mrs. Brand agrees with Mr. Fattibene and Mr. Kery and stated the Board can make decisions all year long. If asked by the Superintendent to be specific about this, moving forward it would be better to have a financial plan and educational plan; that conversation should take place over the spring and fall. Mr. Dwyer stated that he agreed on Tuesday that there should be conversation about this, but perhaps Mr. Kery would like to move that timetable up. Ms. Iacono stated that she is happy that Mr. Kery raised this issue and that difficult decisions will have to be made at this table tonight and on Tuesday. Ms. Iacono stated that she can't support this increase at this time; she would be supportive of 4%, and would welcome discussing caps; there is a need to look at our high school programs and what is offered, that if we cut back on some of these programs it will increase our instructional time. Mr. Kery stated that he is concerned about the size of the health care increase, and that a financial framework must come first. Mr. Liu stated that this is not the first time this has been brought up, and that this is an outrageous budget and cannot hold.

Mrs. Brand asked about the program implementation on page 71, and Dr. Title referred her to page 138. He stated that there are different elements of program implementation, and the calendar below shows which programs are going into place next year. K-2 Math and 6-10 Math are accounted for in a transitional manner. Some are a phase-in. There has been an ongoing review in the English Language Learner arena, and that has not had new materials in a long time. Dr. Title stated that additional information could be found on page 139. Mrs. Brand read this and asked if there will be significant changes in curriculum going forward. Dr. Title said secondary language arts curriculum will change next year. Math changes will be coming shortly. To implement those changes we have to purchase new texts, and there is debate

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around which series or books will be purchased. Mr. Dwyer stated that on page 139, the Board will be asked to approve revised curriculum. Mr. Dwyer stated that the Policy Committee will be looking at policy# 6200 for curriculum review. Dr. Title stated that with curriculum renewal, total dollars spent will be constant and kept on a cycle so that it's not 10 years between renewals. It is a long range plan to revise curriculum.

Mrs. Brand also asked for transportation fuel cost. Dr. Title stated that there is no set price now, Twigg (Holland) told us use \$4.25 gallon, but the Town has to bid this. The dollar amount for transportation includes fuel.

Mrs. Kennelly submitted her list of questions too late in the day, but asked what the plan was for smarter balanced tests. Dr. Title said this was big driver for technology, and is being done over a 2-3 year time period. It's a big concern in every district and is an unfunded mandate. It is a sophisticated program that won't run on old computers. Dr. Title stated that he hopes to give the Board a demo in the spring and the tech capital line went up for this reason.

Mrs. Kennelly stated that she is interested in the idea of students fulfilling physical education credits through varsity sports when coaches are also certified teachers. Ms. Iacono stated that she is also interested in pursuing this and is bothered when students that are heavily involved with sports are forced to miss lunch to make up a physical education class. Dr. Title stated that there are many elements involved, including graduation requirements.

Mr. Convertito, asked what is entailed on page 138 with ELL. Mrs. Cutaia-Leonard stated that she has been conducting an English Language Learner review for a few months now with principals and teachers. Recommendations were made in how to identify students and how to categorize students as (1) those students who are learning the basic language and (2) those students who are moving on to a firmer understanding of the curriculum. The second focus was the instructional model for those. This would provide common materials and instructional models. Mr. Convertito asked for a report on this, and Mrs. Cutaia-Leonard stated that she could prepare material on this. Dr. Title stated that there is a need to take a look at how these students are learning and how they are being serviced.

Mr. Convertito asked if 20% of the middle school population is gifted, would we be better served going back to a leveling system and doing away with .4 gifted teachers? Dr. Title stated that leveling was reduced not eliminated. At the middle schools, levels still exist for math, not for language arts, but the instructional model supports all students. We are working through identification of a large number of students as gifted. Mrs. Gerber asked if there are any requirements to have a gifted program. Dr. Title stated that we are required to identify gifted students but not to have a gifted program, and the testing is done in 2nd and 4th grade. Ms. Iacono asked if currently identified gifted students were to be re-tested, is there a possibility they might in fact not be gifted anymore? Dr. Title stated that the cut scores were raised so that is possible. Ms. Iacono asked how our numbers differ from the State. Dr. Title stated that the numbers are usually at 6% or 7%, not 22% as in our district. Ms. Iacono is interested in knowing the cost of the gifted program at the middle schools. Mrs. Kennelly stated it would be good to know if districts with gifted programs have leveling. Dr. Title stated that regardless of whether we have a gifted program, he is not interested in increasing leveling, and is also not interested in further collapsing the levels. Mrs. Brand stated that we have an obligation to challenge them and meet their needs and stated that challenging pieces should be built into the curriculum. Ms. Iacono agrees with Mrs. Brand and stated that these needs to be met, there should be work on differentiation, and she would support phasing out the gifted program at the middle school to meet the needs. Ms. Iacono would love the gift of more time and stated that we don't have it; we have to have the conversation right now. Mr. Convertito stated that he is not looking to eliminate the gifted program, and is looking for a better way to deal with them. We allow it in math, what about language arts, is there a better way than pull-out, such as not taking sewing?

Mrs. Brand asked how much of the technology plan is on target and how much comes from the PTA's. Dr. Title stated that PTA contributions are viewed as supplemental and there are rules on gifts. Dr. Title stated that is has been made clear to the PTA's that a donation may be supplanting something that will be coming to your school; if there is an imbalance, it is corrected within the budget.

Mrs. Brand asked what we pay for CABE. Dr. Title stated that is approximately \$20,000 and it includes policy service and legal service. CABE is also professional development for Board Members and is a state level advocacy group.

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Mr. Liu asked how much has been put aside in the current budget for security. Dr. Title stated it was mostly for the buzz-in/intercom/video system, and we are still getting pricing, but it is about \$8000 per school. We will do that by not buying lockers for Fairfield Woods MS and looking at other facilities expenses and perhaps not doing a project in that area, provided that we get our OHS money.

Mr. Liu asked with regard to mental health, are we equipped for risk assessment? Ms. Leonardi stated that the best trained in the district for risk assessment are the social workers and stated that they are trained in suicide and risk assessment as part of their license.

Ms. Iacono stated that she is looking at the music program; to scale this back in the elementary school, with chorus, and orchestra. What if we scaled that back, can we start strings in 5th rather than 4th. How can we increase instructional time and find savings in music program? Dr. Title stated that these can be costed out.

Mr. Liu stated that he would be cautious about cutting programs that are already small, and music is math. These programs are always the first to go and are already small. One of the areas that he would like to look at is Central Office. There are lots of clericals; some administrators have 2 secretaries, and this doesn't affect the children and we need to look at this.

Mr. Fattibene stated that we have a class size policy, could we change that? Mr. Dwyer stated that there are contractual obligations, and may be an area of compromise. Dr. Title stated that there are contractual obligations that have been Board negotiated. Dr. Title stated that the audit stated that we were understaffed with clericals as a percentage of total budget .

Ms. Iacono asked for clarification on the audit with the clerical support. Dr. Title stated that we were understaffed for administrators, and the description in Human Resources department that benchmarked the number there with other districts our size and concluded that we were spending less on clerical support.

Mr. Convertito, asked what was the loss on food in the last 2 years because we didn't have generator hook-ups? Mr. Cullen stated that he doesn't have these numbers here but he can provide them. Mr. Convertito asked how the HVAC systems deal with humidity. Mr. Cullen stated that the air conditioning is powerful, and it creates a problem with some of the newer schools, such as in the McKinley kitchen. At Roger Ludlowe Middle School, the problem is in the locker rooms, and there are several ways to fix that and a heating element has been placed in the duct work. Mr. Convertito asked about Fairfield Woods Middle School. Mr. Cullen stated that the Fairfield Woods renovation that was done in mid 90s had new concrete slabs that were poured incorrectly. This was fixed with sealant, and it worked in some areas, but not in the music suite and it is very damp.

Mr. Convertito asked whether the McKinley school playground protection could be fixed for less. Mr. Cullen will look at bollards, and stated that this is a safety issue.

Mr. Convertito asked about Tomlinson Middle School. Mr. Cullen stated that we had 3 bad rains that caused water to fill up and go into the cafeteria, as the old piping failed.

Mr. Convertito asked about the \$25,000 for the Fairfield Ludlowe high school and middle school parking areas. Mr. Cullen stated that the light bollards are falling apart, and were never tamper resistant, and that this is also a safety issue. Mrs. Kennelly asked if reflector circles could be used to stop cars from hitting them. Mr. Cullen stated that these need to be moved from the middle of the parking lot to the perimeter so that there is no possibility of cars hitting them.

Mrs. Kennelly asked about Osborn Hill lights, and Mr. Cullen responded that more would be spent to repair than to replace.

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Mr. Convertito asked about leaking skylights. Mr. Cullen stated that there are no major leaks, but 2 are in bad shape and 2 are pretty good shape at McKinley.

Mr. Kery stated that we continually spend 10's of thousands of dollars on things that are new, don't we ask these contractors to bond forward so that this won't happen. Mr. Cullen said that for certain things such as roofs, there are long warranties, but generally there are 1 year warranties. Mr. Kery stated maybe there should be no skylights, how to avoid these problems with new buildings, costing us millions of dollars over time. Mrs. Brand asked whether it might be possible to have Town attorneys read the contract with regard to the Tomlinson sewage pipe disintegration, in order to protect us. Mr. Convertito stated that we should not accept a building for 11 months until there are 3 full seasons. Mr. Convertito asked whether any of these items are bonded. Dr. Title stated that these projects do not really fall into the capital projects range which is usually between the \$200,000 to \$1 million range, but the Board may always request that a project go in this direction.

Mr. Dwyer asked if this was all that was asked for? Dr. Title stated there is a priority list, and these are the projects that made the cut.

Mrs. Brand stated that the only way to mitigate the insurance is to cut back on employees and employee benefits. Mrs. Brand suggested decreasing Central Office by 1 administrator on page 43, on page 44 item 109 number 64 Business Services decrease by 1, eliminate CAFE, and BOE workshops and conferences, and have curriculum leaders bumped down to become curriculum coordinators so that they may also be classroom teachers.

Ms. Iacono asked what attorney fees may be if the Board does not pay for CAFE's services. Dr. Title stated that he will get that information.

Mrs. Kennelly asked about transportation savings if the kindergarten extended day were either eliminated or reduced to one day per week. Mrs. Kennelly also asked by doing this, if a high school bus could be restored, if this were a 1 to 1 swap. In response to Mrs. Kennelly, Dr. Title stated that changing the curriculum structure will not save any money, and he is concerned about the new teacher and administrator evaluation mandates.

Mrs. Kennelly asked if there is a state statute that requires that all ECC students get transportation. Ms. Leonardi said for Special Education student, yes. Dr. Title stated that typical peers are not offered transportation. Mrs. Kennelly asked if a student gets speech, then do they get transportation? Ms. Leonardi stated that IDEA has defined transportation as a related PK-12 service, meaning a service required in order for the student to benefit from services.

Mrs. Kennelly wondered why, there is a large number for Professional Development for Language Arts. Ms. Cutaiia-Leonard stated that Professional Development continues in common core, investment in handwriting material, and new writing units. The whole shift to increasing to non-fictional text requires more professional development. Dr. Title stated that page 138 has a breakdown.

Mrs. Kennelly asked if there was a variation in the cost of texts and Dr. Title said that there is generally not a big cost difference.

Mrs. Kennelly questioned page 61, Senior Course Subsidy and Dr. Title stated that this is a discount for senior citizens taking Continuing Education courses.

Mrs. Kennelly questioned the 3.5 million for tuition and asked what can be done to prevent so much out of district movement. Ms. Leonardi stated that in order to mitigate the tuition cost, a therapeutic day program for serious depression/anxiety issues is needed, which is not to say that outplacements would stop altogether because some students have very specific needs. The therapeutic day program would provide services to these students so that they could access our courses. Ms. Leonardi stated that she would not recommend using St. Emery's as space for this, and that ultimately a building is needed with therapeutic spaces, music and art therapy, and not just straight academics. Ms. Iacono asked if staffing was costed out with benefits, etc. Ms. Leonardi stated that she could put a plan together; that it would not be

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cheap in the first year. Mrs. Kennelly stated that she thought part of the long range plan was to purchase St. Emery's but we are still renting. Dr. Title stated that the contract has a purchase option, but that is a Town purchase, not a BOE purchase.

Mrs. Kennelly questioned page 21, item 303, the contractual increase, why was it not included in wage/benefit reserve. Ms. Leonardi stated this is a contracted service, not an FTE.

Mrs. Kennelly asked what cutting a guidance counselor at each high school would do. Dr. Title stated that cutting a guidance counselor would be a service reduction to students, and additional staff will be needed for the new teacher evaluation process.

Dr. Title wanted to respond to the Kindergarten suggestion and stated that 1 day a week for Wednesday is \$46,000; it would be a savings if we eliminated extended day kindergarten altogether. Dr. Title asked if the Board would provide direction on the amount of cuts required in this budget.

Mrs. Kennelly asked about the cost per student disparity on page 93. Dr. Title stated there are explanations for that including class size guidelines, SSC programs, and experience level among staff. There is equity at the schools and it is very formulaic.

Mr. Dwyer questioned the sense that we are coming back to Mr. Kery's point of view; perhaps there is an agreement on a budget number and return on Tuesday.

Ms. Iacono stated that she would not support the increase before us, and would like to request a reduction of 1.5 million. Ms. Iacono stated that some of her ideas include: consolidation of secretarial/clerical jobs district wide, sports programs having pay-to-play or pay-to-participate (drama), examination of world language program at the high schools, and raising building rental fees by 10%.

Mrs. Brand stated that the priority is the students, and pensions and benefits are controlled by the number of employees.

Mr. Kery stated that the worst place to increase class size is the elementary level, and is recommending setting a bar and limit but stated his preference would be to have the professionals take a number tonight and come back with what they feel would be the most prudent way to continue. Mr. Kery stated that when he hears administration he gets concerned because it is an easy target; there are 1500 employees servicing 10,000 students. There is more testing, common core, and teacher evaluations that will require leadership. Teachers cannot improve instruction alone; we have 40 administrators and 1500 employees, and that is deficient.

Mr. Kery reminded the Board that an outside source recommended that eliminating full day kindergarten would save money. The State requires kindergarten students to take a nap due to the State's age requirement of being able to start kindergarten at 4 years and 9 months and he stated that he is concerned about the challenges there.

Mr. Kery questioned the insurance for retirees and stated that we are losing approximately \$800,000 dollars every year on this. Liabilities exceed the premium by a large chunk. Are we required to do this contractually? Mr. Dwyer responded yes. Mr. Kery asked what the mandate is. Mr. Dwyer stated that it is built into the teacher contract, and Mr. Kery stated this should be looked at moving forward. Mr. Dwyer stated that is a subject that will have to be addressed at contract time.

Mr. Kery is open to seeing what 4% would look like.

Mr. Liu referred to page 53-56; in all elementary schools, would like to see those clerical extras consolidated/reduced or eliminated. Mr. Liu stated this has to be a shared experience, and that there should be some central office cuts, despite what the audit stated; the audit was done at that time, but that audit did not embrace our time now. We don't want to penalize the students.

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Mr. Dwyer stated the conversation should focus on the number. The entire budget is based on .82 percent increase.

Dr. Title pointed out that this will happen very quickly between now and Tuesday. There is a chance to save us a lot of money by putting the insurance out to bid, but this will not be known by next Tuesday. Dr. Title stated that he would hate to see us commit to a service reduction when this potential savings could happen. Insurance numbers can change, but we'll bring you whatever you need and abide by your decisions.

Mr. Dwyer asked the Board for input on a budget number.

Ms. Iacono stated that she wanted to explain where she got the 1.5, and stated she was willing to go to 4%. Doing this knowing that we could save up to a million dollars with changing insurance carrier. Mandates will not allow us to go after administration.

Mr. Liu asked how long the insurance bids will take. Dr. Title stated that the bids may come back in February and then AON has to go over the numbers and then the bargaining units have to look agree. Mr. Dwyer said this is a Town led bid.

Mr. Liu stated that he can't stay with the budget and would like to see 1 million at least and see what the Superintendent comes back with.

Mr. Convertito stated that he would like to see the income side/revenue looked at as well as cuts, but he does not have a number in mind.

Mrs. Kennelly stated that she likes the 1.5 idea from Ms. Iacono, and stated that Dr. Title came to us with the Superintendent's budget, but on Tuesday it is the Board's budget. We have to think politically and we are not a spendthrift Board. Mrs. Kennelly asked if Dr. Title would welcome ideas from the Board. Mr. Dwyer stated that the Board should always feel free to send in more ideas.

Mrs. Gerber stated that 1.5 makes sense as a starting point.

Mrs. Fattibene said this increase is due to an aberration and by cutting the budget for that one year aberration; reducing programs and services may not be beneficial in the long run. Make a commitment for next year so that more planning time is available. If we cut now, the planning and decisions may not be the best due to the time constraint.

Mrs. Brand stated that the number is driven by employees and stated that she thinks that 1.5 is too large a number and will resonate with the Town. Mrs. Brand stated that she would like to have the opportunity to be thoughtful. If the Town wants to cut us, then fine; we are selling ourselves short. A \$500,000-\$700,000 number is large enough.

Mr. Kery would accept Ms. Iacono's goal of 1.5, with a goal of agreeing on 4% and would like to move forward at a 3% cap next year. He stated that he welcomes discussions on that; we have to demonstrate to this community on where we are going to go.

Mrs. Brand stated that the Board cannot pre-determine a cap. Mr. Dwyer stated that policy can guide. Mr. Kery said the Board can give guidance.

Mr. Dwyer stated that this is a broad range of numbers for the superintendent to be working with. Dr. Title said he will come up a 1.5 budget cut and suggested moving the next meeting to the high school. Dr. Title stated that he will require input from a large number of people, and will be working on this right up until the time of the meeting.

Mr. Liu stated that we should reconsider the agenda for the meeting.

Mrs. Kennelly stated that there is the option of another special meeting.

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Mrs. Brand said the discussion was all over the map. Being specific is hard, easier to give a number, looking for the least amount of detriment. This is not about employment it is about the kids.

Ms. Iacono stated to go ahead and have a special meeting on the 31st to give the administration more time. Mrs. Brand is agreeable.

Dr. Title would like to get it out there on the 29th, and if needed, have an additional meeting on the 30th. Mr. Dwyer stated there was a quorum from the Board on this.

Mr. Liu asked for variations on possibilities of budget cuts, and knows Dr. Title is not a fan of cutting administration. Dr. Title stated that there a few things that no one has even discussed. Dr. Title stated that a few years ago, we absorbed a 2.8 million dollar cut, and we took all the low hanging fruit at that time and we are still experiencing those cuts. Dr. Title stated he will look at every angle and consider all options, but may not be able to recommend all suggestions.

Mr. Dwyer stated that Dr. Title will expand on reasons for not choosing a certain cut.

Mr. Fattibene would like to see the Board's suggestions, with an asterisk next to what Dr. Title's recommendations are.

Mr. Dwyer said there is a range of numbers, and Dr. Title will aim at 1.5, and the list will probably be the same format as the previous cuts.

Mrs. Kennelly asked for information on Board's suggested cuts with the dollar amounts attached.

Mr. Dwyer asked how much time does the staff have to come up with those iterations.

Mrs. Brand stated that she wants to see a price tag with what has been recommended.

Mr. Liu said we need to see these alternatives, and perhaps meet on the 30th if we need an additional day.

Mr. Fattibene would expect a best "guesstimate", not an exact figure, as time is short.

4. Adjournment

Ms. Iacono moved, seconded by Mrs. Gerber the recommended motion "that the Board of Education adjourn this Special meeting at 10:45 p.m."

Motion Carried: 9:0:0

Jessica Gerber
Secretary
Fairfield Board of Education