

Board of Education, Fairfield Public Schools
501 Kings Highway East
2nd Floor Board Conference Room
Tuesday, January 22, 2013

Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Board of Education

1. Call to Order and Roll Call – Executive Session

Mr. Dwyer called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. Other members present were Mrs. Kennelly, Mr. Convertito, Mr. Liu, Mrs. Gerber, Ms. Iacono, Mr. Fattibene, Mr. Kery, Mrs. Brand, Dr. David Title, Mrs. Parks, Mrs. Leffert, and Ms. Melinda Powell.

Mrs. Gerber moved, seconded by Mr. Kery the recommended motion that “the Board of Education convene to Executive Session to discuss pending claims and litigation”

Motion Carried: 8:0:0 *Ms. Iacono was not present for this vote.*

2. Call to Order and Roll Call

Mr. Dwyer called the Special Meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. Other members present were Mrs. Kennelly, Mr. Convertito, 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.

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

Mr. Dwyer stated several questions had been forwarded to Dr. Title in advance of the meeting, and asked that Board members be considerate of the number of questions asked to ensure equal time.

3. Budget Questions

Income Questions

Dr. Title read questions that had been forwarded, related to the Income part of the Budget.

Question: What buckets potential sequestration would impact and the dollar amounts that we could lose. Dr. Title referred to page 6 at the top, divided into revenue to the Town, and revenue to the BOE. For the Town, the biggest risk is the Education Cost Sharing, approximately \$3.6 million dollars. The other big risk for BOE is the excess cost provision, that has been running at 75% of the real number, and we have budgeted for 75% for next year. On a federal level, the biggest impact would be the IDEA grant, Part B, Part B Pre-school, Title 1, Title 2, Title 3 and Perkins. Sequestration has been estimated at 10-15%. If the fiscal cliff were fully enacted it would be around \$250,000-\$350,000 revenue loss. Fairfield is perceived as affluent, and even if the ECS was increased, Fairfield would not get any additional funding. Mr. Convertito asked if Title 1 through IDEA Part B preschool were all mandated programs. Dr. Title stated that Special Education is mandated, Title 1 is money that comes in through No Child Left Behind, and there is no benefit to giving that money back as the same requirements apply.

Mrs. Kennelly asked about the Open Choice numbers. Dr. Title stated that Open Choice is a formula with a bonus attached. Mrs. Kennelly asked about the GED students from Easton, and what those costs were. Dr. Title responded that these classes that are running anyway, so the marginal students that are sent would not impact our cost.

Mr. Kery handed out his affordability study, which shows a simple model of impact to taxpayers. Mr. Kery stated that this budget is similar to last year, but the bigger picture here is the impact of growing at 4.5 % per year over 40 years. Mr. Kery requested comments from Board members on this. Mrs. Brand appreciates this study and would like to see a 5 year financial and education plan, much like what is done for facilities. Mr. Liu thanked Mr. Kery and stated this is a relevant question. Mr. Kery stated that he sees the value of education, and that we have to work within a frame of reference. Mr. Liu stated that he has young children in the school now with years to go, and the time is perhaps now to deal with the problem. Mr. Fattibene stated that the real risk is the fixed cost of wages and benefits and debt service. Ms. Iacono stated that this growth cannot be sustained, the long term financial plan needs to be figured out, as well as program offerings, and difficult decisions will have to be made in order to get back to basics. Mr. Dwyer stated that public education has always been viewed as a public benefit.

Mr. Kery stated there are other issues falling outside of our operating budget such as PCB's that were unanticipated and asked how this gets communicated with other Boards. Dr. Title stated that there are always unknowns, and as long as they are contained, adjustments can be made. Dr. Title stated that going to Town Bodies is a last resort. Mrs. Brand stated that the approach for PCBs that is taken will have a financial impact, depending on the report findings. If the impact is too large, it becomes a capital project.

Ms. Iacono asked if building use fees would be raised. Dr. Title stated that this has to be done in conjunction with the Town. Organizations often pay the fee out of revenue from the event, which means fees often have to be chased. An incentive may be to pay a reduced rate in advance. The real issue is that so many organizations are exempt, and this needs to be discussed with the First Selectman's Office, as they are the recipient of the fees. Ms. Iacono asked how to begin this discussion to generate higher fees. Mr. Dwyer stated that this issue was discussed in Policy Committee about a year ago with information from Mr. Cullen. The Board of Finance has also started to look at their policies for line-item grants for not-for-profits. Mr. Convertito stated that non-profits still pay when renting Penfield, and that after-school programs should pay the custodial overtime. Dr. Title stated that he will show the First Selectman all the non-exempt, the non-billable custodial fees are other Town bodies, and that non-exempts can still pay custodial fees. Mr. Liu stated that custodial overtime for the RTM should come out of the Town budget, not the BOE budget. Mr. Kery stated that he supports charging day care centers for custodial fees, and is open to a discussion on exempt status. Ms. Iacono requested a copy of the research done on this. Mr. Dwyer stated that it is a 1 page policy with many regulations. Mr. Convertito stated that it started as a simple way to generate revenue with a user fee. Ms. Iacono would like this change to affect this budget. Mrs. Kennelly asked if that would require a policy change. Mrs. Brand stated that it would require a policy change and recommended that the Board move on.

Series 100 – Staff Salaries Questions

Dr. Title read questions that had been forwarded.

Question: How many employees work for the district compared to last year, and how many of those are teachers? Dr. Title stated there are 10 fewer people working for the district this year. The number of teachers has gone up, non-certified went down. Number of clerical support staff changed; clerical support has gone up. At the high schools, the number of teachers is different at Warde vs. Ludlowe. Dr. Title stated that he makes an educated guess regarding the FTE's, and the headmasters know that it might change. In April after tallies are in, staffing is flexible depending on the numbers. Mrs. Brand stated that next year there will be more students

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at Fairfield Ludlowe High School. Dr. Title stated that there is flexibility between the high schools and that more teachers are still needed in both places.

Question: Looked as though we were reducing tech support. Tech support is now centralized and sent to the schools based on need, there is no change in level. Only one change; we had one vacancy and spread that out to change some 10 month employees to 11 month employees. Much of the work is done over the summer, and there weren't enough people. We did eliminate 5 technicians 2 years ago.

Question: Why are staffing costs going down but not FTE's? That is because we use existing positions, but people transfer and retire, and there are different pay scales; it is important to look at the FTE count as opposed to salaries. Mrs. Munsell handed out a detailed page of FTE counts, not including grants. Part-time employment and substitutes may vary widely among individual schools depending on how many teachers are out and the length of absence. The wage and benefit reserve contains assumptions related to negotiations and unsettled contracts. Curriculum coordinators are part-time teachers and part-time curriculum coordinators.

Mr. Liu asked about Pupil Personnel Services, 2.80. Dr. Title replied that those are full time administrative positions, and are the front line with special education issues at the schools. Dr. Title stated that these positions are located at Central Office, but they are mostly out in the field at the schools. Department Liaisons are full time teachers and they get a stipend. The clerical extras come in for the summer mailings.

In response to Mr. Liu, Dr. Title stated that the middle school liaisons are given a stipend and they are the go-between with the principal and teams/crews. There are a lot of them making a small amount of money, but looks like a big number when they are all in one place. In response to Mr. Liu, Dr. Title stated that social workers are assigned to the school based on the need of the school.

Ms. Leonardi replied that the social workers are housed in Central Office, and social work services are distributed centrally.

Mr. Liu asked about secretarial services. Dr. Title stated that he would provide a list of secretaries, jobs performed, and location.

Ms. Iacono asked about the substitute rate and whether there is a problem finding a substitute at that rate. Dr. Title stated that it all depends on the day; he is currently researching outsourcing substitutes if it becomes a persistent problem; permanent substitutes or interns are also an option. Ms. Iacono asked for a list of all job descriptions to be online for the public to view. Dr. Title said many job descriptions are out of date, as they are usually updated when there is a vacancy.

Mrs. Brand asked if the new Student Management system will help us move forward and be more efficient. Dr. Title stated that he didn't think it would translate into labor savings, but the tech budget provides \$50-70,000 dollar savings in not having to maintain legacy systems, and that Edline, STAARS, K12Alert, SCAD, and Antares will be phased out.

Mrs. Gerber asked on page 17, how will it work to have only a slight increase in FTE's? Dr. Title stated that in this budget there will be fewer elementary teachers than high school teachers; due to turnover there are no layoffs anticipated.

Mrs. Kennelly asked if the social workers change has affected the school climate. Dr. Title stated the biggest impact was on the psychologists.

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Mrs. Brand asked if we anticipate moving forward budgeting for security. Dr. Title said that we did not budget for additional security personnel, but we will be working with the police. No additional security personnel in the BOE budget. If infrastructure improvement is needed, it will most likely be a capital improvement.

Mr. Liu asked on page 58, regarding the part time printing service. Dr. Title stated that is an hourly person and there is also a full time clerical person, there is no change.

In response to Ms. Iacono, Dr. Title stated a sub clerk manages the call-in of the substitute teachers.

Mrs. Brand asked about Dr. Title's salary. Dr. Title stated that his entire salary can be found in the pension, mileage, and salary accounts.

Mrs. Gerber asked if there is a shift to grants. Ms. Leonardi stated that there is a slight increase in para staffing as it relates to needs of students with significant needs. Some reallocation was made in IDEA grants, to what was needed overall, to take some additional paras into that grant account.

Mrs. Gerber asked on page 50, custodian driver and 8.5 head custodians. Dr. Title answered they are not all in central office; there is no change there, but we will find that answer.

Mrs. Kennelly asked about online learning. Dr. Title stated that there have been many false starts on this, but beginning to research PLATO, right now using it in a limited way for homebound and Alternative High School students. Mr. Kery said he is an advocate for our own online learning. Dr. Title stated that this idea has potential but there is a space issue.

Series 200 Questions - Benefits

Dr. Title discussed the pension and stated the vast majority of Board of Education employees are not part of the Town pension; only non-certified employees are; benefit plans and assumptions are the same; it can't be forecasted precisely. Mrs. Brand asked if we forecast with this specific group for retirement and Dr. Title responded that the pension folks update this periodically.

Dr. Title read a question regarding social security, and the reason for a drop in that number on page 59. Mrs. Munsell stated that certified teachers and administrators pay into the TRB; those hired prior to April 1986 do not require any additional funds; those hired after April 1986 must have their medicare piece matched. On the non-certified side, we do pay social security but we also have a FICA alternative program that is not matched. If seasonal/hourly hired after 2005, then required to be in the FICA alternative program which is not matched. The number went down because the FTE's in the operating budget went down. Mr. Converito wanted to clarify that the decrease in social security indicates that we had a lot of teachers that left. Ms. Munsell stated that the decrease is due to positions that moved were FICA type positions. Mr. Kery requested up-to-date information on the internal service fund from the Town. This will be needed by Thursday in order to vote on this budget. Dr. Title stated that he used the AON actuarial numbers for the budget, and does not know how much better the Town is, and this is a volatile account. He stated he will try to get this information from the Town by Tuesday. Mr. Kery asked that the Board ask the chair to directly ask the First Selectman for this information. Mr. Converito stated that this number been different each year. Dr. Title stated that there was a Memorandum of Understanding that was informal. Dr. Title stated that the Town understands how we are budgeting, as we are going on less complete information, according to our expert advice from AON. Ms. Iacono stated the information is out there, would be helpful if the chair would reach out to First Selectman to help get this information in order to make a fully informed decision. Mrs. Brand asked that the Board get the same information as the Board of Finance gets. Mr. Kery would like an update through December 31. Mr. Fattibene

asked about the MOU that was with Town and the previous superintendent, that had certain requirements on this fund. Dr. Title stated that there was a MOU with previous Superintendent and the previous First Selectman at the time that the Board and the Town converted from fully-insured to self-insured. One of the requirements was that if the fund went low, the Town would help because the Board of Education was taking the risk. At the same time, it allowed the Town to keep money when the Board of Education had a good year and the Town had a bad year. There is some question now as to whether that understanding is still valid. In June 2011, there were issues about how the Board of Education was budgeting for insurance, and that is when a new MOU was discussed but never came to fruition. Mr. Dwyer stated the Board relies on the working relationship among Dr. Title, Mr. Flynn and Mr. Tetreau to budget for insurance. Dr. Title mentioned that a complicating factor is the bond rating. Mr. Dwyer stated that we are following the AON recommendation to have 1xIBNR with a 9.2 trend. Mr. Fattibene stated that we are putting in what was put in last year plus the recommendation from AON. Mr. Kery asked how the 9.2 trend compares to the actual results. Dr. Title stated that the actual trend was more like 20, but AON recommended that we go with 9.2.

Mr. Convertito, asked about page 19, vs. page 9, he sees an increase in para staff, and requested more info on benefits vs. salary. Ms. Leonardi stated that the page 19 is this year's budget number. Dr. Title stated that Mrs. Munsell will research this question further.

Mr. Convertito asked why we are providing retirement for Food Services, which was typically self-funded. Ms. Munsell stated that there were so many changes this year, and they could not absorb this increase, so we are contributing. Mr. Convertito requested a year-to-date comparison on the Food Services budget. Ms. Iacono confirmed that in years past, the Food Services dept. covered their own pension with their own profits. Dr. Title stated that recent developments proved too much to handle.

Ms. Iacono asked if we are looking at moving towards and actively pursuing transitioning to a 401K option for non-union employees. Dr. Title stated that we are looking at this for unionized as well. Ms. Iacono asked if we could pursue this for our non-union as well and Dr. Title said yes. Mr. Kery would like the administration to outline what we need to maintain an independent budget number for Food Services. Dr. Title stated that page 177 gives actual vs. budgeted number for Food Services; there is a formula that we are keeping within, and we have been draining it for a variety of reasons. Mrs. Brand stated that the pension fund is not doing well these days for anyone. Dr. Title said the large balance has been eaten up.

Mr. Dwyer stated the Board will pick up on the 300 accounts to the end of the book and cover any additional questions at Thursday's meeting. He also requested that Board members with policy questions for Tuesday's meeting should email those questions so the entire Board may be prepared.

4. Adjournment

Ms. Iacono moved, seconded by Mrs. Kennelly, the recommended motion, "that this Special Meeting of the Board of Education adjourn at 9:55 p.m."

Motion Carried: 9:0:0