

**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING
COUNCIL CHAMBERS, 3 PRIMROSE STREET, NEWTOWN, CT
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20, 2024**

MINUTES

PRESENT: Jordana Bloom, Laura Miller, Keith Alexander, Tom Long, Ben Ruben, Derek Pisani, Jennifer Nicoletti, John Zachos, Chris Gardner, Heather Dean, Eric Paradis, Jill Soderholm

ALSO PRESENT: First Selectman Jeff Capeci, Finance Director Bob Tait, Director of Public Works Fred Hurley, Jay Nezvesky and Pat Reilly from the Board of Fire, Superintendent Chris Melillo, BOE Chair Alison Plante, Don Ramsey, Doria Linnetz, Dr. Ross and Dr. Longobucco and 10 members of the public

CALL TO ORDER: K. Alexander called the meeting to order with the Pledge of Allegiance at 7:36pm.

VOTER COMMENT: None

MINUTES: J. Bloom moved to approve the minutes of the 3/13/24 regular and public meetings, H. Dean seconded. D. Pisani and J. Nicoletti have corrections. K. Alexander asked them to write them up so the rest of the council had time to review. The minutes can be accepted at the next meeting. J. Bloom withdrew the motion.

J. Bloom moved to approve the minutes of the 3/13/24 public hearing. D. Pisani seconded, all in favor.

COMMUNICATIONS: 5 emails were received, 4 in support of the BOE budget and 1 in support of of BOE Budget cut (att.).

COMMITTEE REPORTS: J. Bloom reported that the Ordinance committee met prior to this meeting. Jeff Capeci and Fred Hurley were present and helped them with the complexity of issues coming forward concerning the Transfer Station and recycling. The Ordinance committee is tasked to determine if the recycling ad hoc committee should become a permanent board.

FIRST SELECTMAN'S REPORT: First Selectman Capeci reported that he and Bob Tait went to Hartford for the bond sale. They are evaluating the appraisal for 3 Main Street and 6 Commerce Road. There is an action plan group that has formed for Safe Streets grant. Once the action plan is developed they will apply for funding. This Friday there is a hearing for the state historic preservation. Today they came to a tentative agreement with the Dispatch bargaining unit.

NEW BUSINESS

Transfer – J. Bloom moved to transfer \$13,100 from Contingency to Repairs & Maintenance (fire) (att.).
B. Ruben seconded, all in favor.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

2024-2025 BOS and BOE Budget - Pat Reilly and Jay Nezvesky of the Board of Fire answered questions regarding their budget request. The increased request in electric was questioned. J. Nezvesky explained that the amount requested is based on actual usage. The increase in budget for length of service was also questioned. B. Tait explained that it is like a pension.

BOE Chair Alison Plante, Superintendent Chris Melillo, High School Principle Dr. Longobucco, Middle School Principle Dr. Ross and BOE members Don Ramsey and Doria Linnetz answered questions regarding the BOE budget. LC had also provided questions in writing that were answered by the BOE (att.)

Superintendent Melillo explained that there is a chronic absenteeism issue right now and they had social services the state used to provide where it was a truancy issue which they no longer do. Pushing the Deans off a year or two will not be a benefit. He explained that building administrators should be instructional leaders. He doesn't want Principals who are highly trained, highly education basically handling investigations and discipline issues. Current absenteeism is 10%, last year it was 10.3% and before the pandemic it was 4%. Dr. Longobucco, High School Principle, articulated that they are putting a band aid on a problem. They are having teachers acting as a dean and there is no continuity. If a student is called down 3 days in a row they may see 3 different teachers and there is no relationship that is building built. It was questioned if the Dean positions were not added in the budget what would happen. Dr. Longobucco explained that they continue to run as they are but it is not the functional way to run a school and the issue could get worse. Dr. Ross explained that it is the similar situation at the Middle School. It takes a lot of time each day and takes away from him being able to get into the class rooms and evaluate the teachers. You are speaking to multiple students, you are speaking to families, you are documenting. We want to spend time with the students, the climate and culture of the school, working with staff so that they are all equipped with restorative practices so that they don't have as many situations where they are reacting. Superintendent Melillo also explained that there is a 50 page document of state mandates. Not all have a cost associated but many do. The right to reading act last year cost about \$350,000 in budgeting dollars and doesn't take into account consumables that go with those programs. Every 5 years each school needs to have air quality testing which is a quarter of a million dollars.

D. Pisani requested the addition of Todd Higgins Board of Education Resignation letter that he referenced during his comments be attached to the minutes (att.). J. Nicoletti explained that this is not about cutting, this is about taking the budget and look at what we can afford. Everyone makes decision for what they need and what they want. They all want best for the children but they also need to figure out what the town can afford. E. Paradis articulated that Principles need to be in classrooms and make connections with every student, build relationships with students. If the dean positions help to achieve that then is necessary.

C. Gardner reported that Finance and Administration met last night and asked a series of questions. They made a motion as a committee to reduce the Health District contingency from \$35,000 to \$25,000. Their

concern was that the amount was not justified enough. The Finance Director answered questions in writing from the committee (att.).

Voter Comment – Alex Villamil, 11 Antler Pine Road – He is in favor of the BOE Budget. His full statement is attached.

Announcements – Next Monday's meeting will be cancelled

Having no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:44pm.

*Respectfully submitted,
Arlene Miles, Clerk*

Attachment: Correspondence, Transfer, BOE Q&A, Higgins resignation, Finance Committee Q&A, Villamil comments



Arlene Miles <arlene.miles@newtown-ct.gov>

RE: Supporting school budget [Form submission from: Contact the Newtown Legislative Council]

1 message

Keith Alexander <lc.alexanderk@gmail.com>
To: Meredith Campbell Britton <mcampbellbritton@gmail.com>
Cc: Arlene Miles <arlene.miles@newtown-ct.gov>

Wed, Mar 20, 2024 at 4:10 PM

Hello Meredith,

Thank you for bringing your comments about the budget to the Legislative Council. As our deliberations continue, we will keep your thoughts in mind.

Your submission will be added to the correspondence of the next Legislative Council meeting.

--Keith

CC: LC Clerk

BCC: LC

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Respectfully,

Keith Alexander

Chair, Newtown Legislative Council

From: newtownct via newtownct <cmsmailer@civicplus.com>
Sent: Wednesday, March 20, 2024 12:14 PM
To: lc.alexanderk@gmail.com
Subject: Form submission from: Contact the Newtown Legislative Council

Submitted on Wednesday, March 20, 2024 - 12:13pm
Submitted by anonymous user: 172.70.114.42
Submitted values are:

Your name: Meredith Campbell Britton
Your e-mail address: mcampbellbritton@gmail.com

Subject: Supporting school budget

Message:

Good morning,

My name is Meredith Campbell Britton. I'm a Newtown homeowner and the parent of two current Newtown public school students (Reed and NHS). I'm writing today to ask you to support the proposed educational budget for 2024-2025. The budget maintains the necessary structures to support students and families, including fulfilling state requirements, providing academic options for students with different learning styles or interests, and offering robust extracurricular activities. Importantly, the budget also addresses frequent student behavioral issues and recognition of developmental delays or learning difficulties.

As a homeowner, I am never thrilled to see my taxes go up. I am also frustrated by the pay disparities between our highest- and lowest-paid educational employees, particularly regarding our paraprofessionals. But I also understand that my investment in my home is largely dependent on the reputation of our school system. We should continue to critically assess academic performance, student experience, staff retention, and other quality indicators. My concern is that further cuts to the school budget risk diminishing all of these.

Sincerely,

Meredith Campbell Britton

The results of this submission may be viewed at:

<https://www.newtown-ct.gov/node/86983/submission/173901>



Arlene Miles <arlene.miles@newtown-ct.gov>

RE: Education budget [Form submission from: Contact the Newtown Legislative Council]

1 message

Keith Alexander <lc.alexanderk@gmail.com>
To: Betsy Litt <betsylitt@gmail.com>
Cc: Arlene Miles <arlene.miles@newtown-ct.gov>

Wed, Mar 20, 2024 at 4:13 PM

Hi Betsy,

I appreciate you for bringing your comments about the budget to the Legislative Council. As our deliberations continue, we will keep your thoughts in mind.

Your submission will be added to the correspondence of the next Legislative Council meeting.

--Keith

CC: LC Clerk

BCC: LC

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Respectfully,

Keith Alexander

Chair, Newtown Legislative Council

From: newtownct via newtownct <cmsmailer@civicplus.com>
Sent: Wednesday, March 20, 2024 1:36 PM
To: lc.alexanderk@gmail.com
Subject: Form submission from: Contact the Newtown Legislative Council

Submitted on Wednesday, March 20, 2024 - 1:36pm
Submitted by anonymous user: 172.70.39.212
Submitted values are:

Your name: Betsy Litt
Your e-mail address: betsylitt@gmail.com

Subject: Education budget

Message:

To Keith Alexander, Legislative Council Chair, and members of the Legislative Council:

I'm writing to ask you to restore the cuts to the Board of Education budget from the Board of Finance. The Board of Education budget as originally proposed is reasonable, and these cuts would harm Newtown's students.

Our schools are facing extraordinary challenges this year. As a result of the school closures during the pandemic, our schools must address learning gaps and chronic absenteeism. Inflation has also had an impact on education expenses, as it has on our individual household expenses. There are other factors that increase expenses but are not under the Board of Education's control, including unfunded state mandates, Special Education services, and contractual and benefit increases.

Advocates of budget cuts cite test scores as a reason to cut the Board of Education budget. Test scores are only one of many markers of school quality and achievement, and decreasing the budget will only result in fewer resources for students. Punishing schools for lower test scores will not result in higher test scores; it can only result in inferior education across all markers, which could only lower test scores even further.

Advocates of budget cuts also cite decreasing enrollment. The Board of Education has already made significant staffing cuts over the past few years. But changes in enrollment don't directly correlate with costs, and elementary school enrollment is now rising. In order to maintain high quality education and support for Newtown's children, we can't allow further staffing cuts. If we want Newtown to have a vibrant and viable future, and if we want to maintain our property values, we need our schools to remain strong.

Please don't let false narratives deprive our schools of the resources they need to educate our children. Please restore the Board of Education's budget. Our children and our town deserve strong schools that can provide a strong education!

Thank you for your consideration.

Betsy Litt

86 Great Hill Rd, Newtown

The results of this submission may be viewed at:

<https://www.newtown-ct.gov/node/86983/submission/173916>



Arlene Miles <arlene.miles@newtown-ct.gov>

RE: Education funding [Form submission from: Contact the Newtown Legislative Council]

1 message

Keith Alexander <lc.alexanderk@gmail.com>
To: Taylor Kintop <taylorkintop@gmail.com>
Cc: Arlene Miles <arlene.miles@newtown-ct.gov>

Wed, Mar 20, 2024 at 4:46 PM

Hello Taylor,

Thank you for bringing your comments about the budget to the Legislative Council. As our deliberations continue, we will keep your thoughts in mind.

Your submission will be added to the correspondence of the next Legislative Council meeting.

--Keith

CC: LC Clerk

BCC: LC

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Respectfully,

Keith Alexander

Chair, Newtown Legislative Council

From: newtownct via newtownct <cmsmailer@civicplus.com>

Sent: Wednesday, March 20, 2024 4:42 PM

To: lc.alexanderk@gmail.com

Subject: Form submission from: Contact the Newtown Legislative Council

Submitted on Wednesday, March 20, 2024 - 4:41pm

Submitted by anonymous user: 172.70.114.192

Submitted values are:

Your name: Taylor Kintop
Your e-mail address: taylorkintop@gmail.com
Subject: Education funding
Message:
Taylor Kintop
[8 Lake Road](#)
[Newtown CT 06470](#)

Please vote in favor of the Newtown school system, and to prevent further budget cuts to our education division.

The results of this submission may be viewed at:
<https://www.newtown-ct.gov/node/86983/submission/173921>



Arlene Miles <arlene.miles@newtown-ct.gov>

RE: Support the BOE Budget [Form submission from: Contact the Newtown Legislative Council]

1 message

Keith Alexander <lc.alexanderk@gmail.com>
To: Heather Symes <hsymes82@gmail.com>
Cc: Arlene Miles <arlene.miles@newtown-ct.gov>

Wed, Mar 20, 2024 at 4:06 PM

Hi Heather,

Thanks for letting us know about the posting of the agenda. I believe it was filed with the Town Clerk but did not end on the website.

I appreciate you for bringing your comments about the budget to the Legislative Council. As our deliberations continue, we will keep your thoughts in mind.

Your submission will be added to the correspondence of the next Legislative Council meeting.

--Keith

CC: LC Clerk

BCC: LC

Any opinions above are my own and do not represent those of the Legislative Council as a whole.

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Respectfully,

Keith Alexander

Chair, Newtown Legislative Council

From: newtownct via newtownct <cmsmailer@civicplus.com>

Sent: Wednesday, March 20, 2024 9:41 AM

To: lc.alexanderk@gmail.com

Subject: Form submission from: Contact the Newtown Legislative Council

Submitted on Wednesday, March 20, 2024 - 9:40am
Submitted by anonymous user: 172.71.190.161
Submitted values are:

Your name: Heather Symes
Your e-mail address: hsymes82@gmail.com
Subject: Support the BOE Budget
Message:
LC Members,

I am writing to you in support of the education budget as presented by Mr. Melillo. I hope that funds are restored to this budget. Funding our schools are important for our home values. I understand that prices are increasing everywhere. We are feeling it as well as small business owners. However, cutting our school budget is not something I feel comfortable with. Please restore funds to the education budget and pass the budget as presented by Mr. Melillo.

On a side note - the agenda for tonight's meeting has not been posted.

Thank you,

Heather Symes
6 Lake Rd, Newtown

The results of this submission may be viewed at:
<https://www.newtown-ct.gov/node/86983/submission/173886>



Arlene Miles <arlene.miles@newtown-ct.gov>

RE: BOE Budget cut [Form submission from: Contact the Newtown Legislative Council]

1 message

Keith Alexander <lc.alexanderk@gmail.com>
To: Brigitte Sorensen <bridgettesorensen@gmail.com>
Cc: Arlene Miles <arlene.miles@newtown-ct.gov>

Fri, Mar 15, 2024 at 4:33 PM

Hello Bridgette,

Thank you for bringing your comments about the budget to the Legislative Council. As our deliberations continue, we will keep your thoughts in mind.

Your submission will be added to the correspondence of the next Legislative Council meeting.

--Keith

CC: LC Clerk

BCC: LC

Any opinions above are my own and do not represent those of the Legislative Council as a whole.

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Respectfully,

Keith Alexander

Chair, Newtown Legislative Council

From: newtownct via newtownct <cmsmailer@civicplus.com>
Sent: Thursday, March 14, 2024 11:14 AM
To: lc.alexanderk@gmail.com
Subject: Form submission from: Contact the Newtown Legislative Council

Submitted on Thursday, March 14, 2024 - 11:13am
Submitted by anonymous user: 172.70.39.54

Submitted values are:

Your name: Brigitte Sorensen

Your e-mail address: bridgettesorensen@gmail.com

Subject: BOE Budget cut

Message:

LC;

On behalf of our household it is our understanding that the information provided by the Newtown Bee which claims that the BOE cut was inaccurate and misleading. Now that we understanding how the cut was redirected and maintaining the proposed cut, avoiding any increases to our taxes would be in the best interest of all tax payers and this community. Please refrain from appropriating additional funds.

The results of this submission may be viewed at:

<https://www.newtown-ct.gov/node/86983/submission/173871>

**TOWN OF NEWTOWN
APPROPRIATION (BUDGET) TRANSFER REQUEST**

FISCAL YEAR

2023 - 2024

DEPARTMENT Fire

DATE

3/11/24

FROM: Account
101245700000-5899CONTINGENCY

Amount
(13,100) USE NEGATIVE
AMOUNT

TO: 101123200000-5430REPAIR & MAINTENANCE SERVICES

13,100
USE POSITIVE
AMOUNT

REASON:

Transfer from Contingency. See attached memo. Transfer request is only for the removal of firefighting foam (B) from three fire apparatus for \$13,100. This amount will be reimbursed from the State of Connecticut.

AUTHORIZATION:

date:

(1) DEPARTMENT HEAD


(2) FINANCE DIRECTOR

(3) SELECTMAN

(4) BOARD OF SELECTMEN

(5) BOARD OF FINANCE

(6) LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL



3/13/24

AUTHORIZATION SIGN OFF

FIRST 335 DAYS >>>>WITH IN A DEPT.>>>>LESS THAN \$50,000>>>> (1), (2) & (3) SIGNS OFF; MORE THAN \$50,000>>>> (1), (2), (3) & (5)
>>>>ONE DEPT TO ANOTHER>>>>LESS THAN \$200,000>>>>ALL EXCEPT (6); MORE THAN \$200,000>>>>ALL SIGN OFF
AFTER 335 DAYS >>>>(1), (2), (3), (5) & (6) ANY AMOUNT FROM CONTINGENCY>>>> ALL SIGN OFF

To Robert Tait,

The Board of Fire Commissioners is requesting funds to cover the cost of removing class B firefighting foam. Class B foam is primarily used to extinguish flammable liquids and petroleum fires (vehicle fires). CT-DEEP (Department of Energy and Environmental Protection) has outlawed the use of class B foam because of health and environmental issues which have required the Town of Newtown and the Board of Fire Commissioners to take action to comply with this state mandate.

The Town of Newtown has three fire trucks that carry this firefighting foam that was identified as having banned additives (PSAF). The State of CT has produced a compliant procedure to rid the Town Fire Departments of this foam and has put in place a procedure to reimburse for the work performed. The reimbursement is on a first come first served basis and therefore needs to be initiated soon. Three in-state companies were quoted for the work required including proper disposal as required by DEEP procedures. An amount of **\$13,066.70** was lowest quoted to do the work.

The Board of Fire Commissioners will initiate this process and has funds to temporarily cover the cost from its own budget. Not knowing the timeline of the State of CT for reimbursement this money will need to be replenished so we can continue to pay expenses for the remainder of the 2023-2024 budget.

The Board of Fire Commissioners is also requesting additional funds to be added to the truck repair line item to cover unexpected costly repairs. We have had several major repairs this year. The BOFC truck repair line item is designed for annual inspections and maintenance not major fire pump and engine repairs. Because of these additional repairs we have a deficit in this account. The amount of **\$25,000.00** is being requested to cover an expected deficit of \$12,000 by the end of this month with additional funds to hopefully take this account to the end of the budget year. In total we are requesting \$38,066.70

T. J. Whelan
2/13/2024

Responses to Legislative Council - Education Subcommittee Questions on 2024-25 Board of Education Budget Request

Please note that we addressed many of the questions provided during our discussions on March 5th and March 11th. This document contains responses to questions we did not previously cover.

Can we get a breakdown of all school-based staff who are tasked with dealing with student wellness/support/behavior interventions and what those tasks entail? What metrics will be used to evaluate the ROI if hiring new Dean of Student positions and in what timeframe?

	Principals	Assistant Principals	Lead Teachers	Social Workers	School Psych	Guidance Counselors	General Ed BCBA	Family Counselor	Behavioral Interventionist Para
Hawley	1		1		1	1	0.25	0.14	1
Head O' Meadow	1		1		1	1	0.25	0.14	1
Middle Gate	1		1		1	1	0.25	0.14	1
Sandy Hook	1		1		1	1	0.25	0.14	1
Reed	1	1		2	2	3		0.14	
NMS	1	1		2	2	3		0.14	
NHS	1	2		3	3	9		0.14	

The following positions support mental health and wellness:

- Social Workers - RIS, NMS, NHS- work with students who are in special education and require counseling as indicated on their IEP's. Counseling is school-based (not therapeutic as would be received outside of school) meaning discussing students' academics and social/emotional needs. SWs also conduct home visits, connect families with outside resources, etc.. Member of the school buildings crisis team.
- School Psychologists - All Levels- Conduct Evaluations, Facilitate PPT meetings (except NHS), attend 504 meetings when requested, and provide counseling to students as indicated on an IEP for students in special education. NHS School Psychologists do not facilitate PPT meetings, however, attend PPT meetings as well as 504's. Member of the buildings crisis team.
- School Counselors - Elem, RIS, NMS- Run all 504 meetings, facilitate group meetings with predominantly general education students (lunch bunch,etc), Member of the building's crisis team.
- General Education Board-Certified Behavioral Analyst (BCBA) - this role was newly implemented this year to build the capacity of the elementary general education teachers in their classrooms when working with students who exhibit social/emotional dysfunction. The BCBA works with the staff providing techniques and skills to be utilized in the classroom with emotionally dysregulated students, and conducts observations and professional development.

- Nurses - The school nurse serves as a pivotal figure within the school community, offering compassionate care and promoting the health and well-being of students. The school nurse administers first aid, assesses health needs, and manages ongoing medical conditions for students. Beyond reactive measures, they play a proactive role in health education, providing guidance on topics such as nutrition, hygiene, and mental health.

The following positions deal with discipline issues:

- Principals: As the leader of the school community, the principal shoulders significant responsibilities in addressing discipline, including compliance with Title IX regulations and Connecticut state laws regarding bullying. This entails promptly investigating any reported incidents of harassment, discrimination, or bullying, ensuring that proper procedures are followed to protect the rights and safety of all students involved. The principal collaborates with relevant stakeholders, such as teachers, counselors, and parents, to gather information and implement appropriate disciplinary measures or interventions. Additionally, they are tasked with fostering a school culture that prioritizes respect, tolerance, and inclusivity, through educational initiatives and proactive measures to prevent future incidents. However, addressing discipline, especially complex cases involving Title IX or bullying issues can be time-consuming, often requiring thorough documentation, meetings, and follow-up actions. This process demands careful attention and diligence to uphold the principles of fairness and justice while safeguarding the well-being of students.
- Assistant Principals / Lead Teachers: Lead teachers and assistant principals play crucial roles in supporting discipline within school buildings while managing various other responsibilities. They work closely with the principal to enforce disciplinary policies and procedures, ensuring a safe and orderly learning environment. Lead teachers often provide guidance and support to their colleagues, offering insights and strategies for managing student behavior effectively. Additionally, they may collaborate with the school's leadership team to develop and implement behavior intervention plans tailored to individual student needs. Assistant principals also play a pivotal role in discipline, handling disciplinary referrals, conducting investigations, and administering consequences as necessary. Beyond discipline, lead teachers and assistant principals are involved in a range of other responsibilities, including teacher evaluations, student support services, and parent communication. Their multifaceted roles require strong organizational and leadership skills to balance the demands of discipline with their other duties, contributing to the overall success and functioning of the school community.
- Dean of Students: The role of a Dean of Students serves as a vital support system for principals in managing discipline, cultivating a positive school culture, fostering strong relationships with families, and enabling principals to focus on instructional leadership. By collaborating closely with the principal, the Dean of Students can assist in implementing and enforcing disciplinary policies and procedures, ensuring consistency and fairness in addressing student behavior issues. Moreover, the Dean of Students plays a crucial role in fostering a positive school climate by organizing and implementing programs that promote respect, empathy, and inclusivity among students. Through proactive measures such as mentoring programs, conflict resolution initiatives, and character education, the Dean of Students helps create a supportive environment

conducive to academic success and personal growth. Additionally, they serve as a liaison between the school and families, communicating effectively and transparently to address concerns, provide support, and build trust. By relieving the principal of some administrative burdens related to discipline and family engagement, the Dean of Students enables principals to dedicate more time and energy to instructional leadership, focusing on improving teaching and learning outcomes throughout the school community.

Measuring the return on investment (ROI) for the school dean position involves evaluating various factors related to student outcomes, school climate, and administrative efficiency. One key aspect is examining changes in disciplinary incidents and student behavior over time. A decrease in disciplinary referrals, suspensions, or incidents of bullying and harassment could indicate the effectiveness of the dean's interventions and support systems in creating a positive school culture. Additionally, improvements in academic performance, attendance rates, and graduation rates may reflect the impact of the dean's efforts in fostering a conducive learning environment. Surveys and feedback from students, staff, and parents can also provide valuable insights into the perceived value and effectiveness of the dean's role in promoting student well-being and supporting the school community. Analyzing the dean's contributions to administrative efficiency, such as time saved for the principal in handling disciplinary matters or improved coordination of support services, can help assess the cost-effectiveness of the position. By considering these quantitative and qualitative indicators, the school district can gauge the ROI of the school dean position and make informed decisions regarding resource allocation and staffing priorities.

There is a %532.33 percent increase from \$11,740 to \$74,235 in general support services staff training requested. Can you explain the large increase? How much are we paying for virtual/online and in-person professional learning services? Do we use or are there opportunities for professional learning designed and taught by our own staff to peers? What data do we have on effectiveness?

General Support Services

The increase can be attributed to two important staffing training programs: DEAI (Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion) training and CASBO (Connecticut Association of School Business Officials) training. As the educational landscape continues to evolve, fostering an inclusive and equitable environment has become imperative, driving the adoption of DEAI training to equip staff with the necessary tools and insights to support diverse student populations effectively. Simultaneously, the complex nature of school finance and administration necessitates ongoing professional development, prompting investment in CASBO training to enhance the skills and knowledge of key personnel such as the Director of Business and Finance.

All other staff training under general support services has remained flat or decreased.

Nixon & Company - \$60,000

The decision to enlist Nixon and Co. as a DEAI (Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion) consultant for the school district, funded by grants over the past two years and now incorporated into our budget at a cost of \$60,000, reflects a proactive approach by the Board of Education (BOE) to address critical social and educational issues. With a dedicated DEAI Subcommittee already in place, the district is demonstrating its commitment to fostering an inclusive and equitable learning environment for all students, staff, and stakeholders. By leveraging the expertise of Nixon and Co. the district aims to implement comprehensive strategies that promote diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion across its educational programs, policies, and practices, ultimately fostering a more supportive and enriching educational experience for everyone involved.

CT Association of School Business Officials (CASBO) Professional Development - \$2,400

The Director of Business and Finance is set to undergo enriching professional development through engagement with CASBO, the Connecticut Association of School Business Officials. This training opportunity promises to empower the director with essential skills and knowledge vital for navigating the complex landscape of school finance and administration. By participating in CASBO's programs, the director can expect to gain valuable insights, build professional networks, and acquire best practices tailored to the unique challenges and requirements of managing finances within the educational sector. This investment in professional growth underscores the district's commitment to ensuring effective financial stewardship and resource management, ultimately contributing to the overall success and sustainability of the educational institution.

General comments

Professional development within the district encompasses a multifaceted approach, drawing upon internal expertise, online resources, and external presenters. In response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, professional learning and conferences transitioned predominantly to virtual platforms, enabling educators to continue their growth remotely. The district's commitment to fostering learning extends beyond its internal resources, as it actively seeks out external expertise to supplement areas where additional knowledge and support are required.

Throughout the pandemic, the district has recognized the value of tapping into external resources to enrich professional development initiatives. By leveraging the expertise of external presenters, the district ensures access to specialized knowledge and diverse perspectives, enhancing the quality and depth of learning experiences for educators. This strategic collaboration underscores the district's dedication to facilitating continuous growth and innovation within its educational community, even amidst unprecedented challenges.

To comprehensively assess the effectiveness of professional development initiatives, a range of data sources is utilized within our district. Firstly, qualitative feedback from educators provides valuable insights into the perceived impact of training sessions on their instructional practices and student outcomes. Additionally, quantitative data such as pre- and post-assessment scores, student achievement data, and classroom observation reports offer objective measures of the extent to which professional development activities translate into tangible improvements in teaching effectiveness. By synthesizing these diverse data points, we gain a holistic understanding of the efficacy of our professional development efforts, enabling us to refine

strategies and prioritize resources to continually enhance teacher effectiveness and student learning outcomes.

Dear Board of Education Colleagues:

As some of you already know, I am in the process of relocating to Florida later this Spring to pursue certain business and teaching opportunities, and will no longer be domiciled in Connecticut, which means I will no longer be eligible to hold office in Newtown. Given the many important matters facing the Board, I have decided to step down now, so that a successor can quickly be appointed and can thereafter begin contributing to the critical decision-making ahead. For your reference, attached is my letter of resignation, effective as of February 20, 2024, filed with the Clerk.

From my perspective, Newtown faces serious challenges with its school system, many of which I have publicly discussed at length over the past year, including lackluster academic progress, declining post-secondary readiness, unaddressed performance gaps, inefficient allocation of existing budget resources, inadequate long-term facility planning, minimal investment in research and innovation, non-compliance with Board of Education policies, and alarming indicators of systemic leadership failures across multiple core functions, including district goal setting, school Board of Education -2- February 22, 2024

security and safety, pupil services, data utilization, and performance accountability. These challenges are real, they are non-partisan, and as I have often sought to highlight during my time on the Board, they are capable of objective, evidence-based assessment, if only we choose to look.

The good news is that, while many of these challenges are hard and often frustrating, they are also solvable with honesty, collaboration, and the courage to act. Unfortunately, that appears to be the greatest challenge of all. As I see it, there is an entrenched culture of fear and resistance to change permeating the system, and a corresponding lack of courage to address that resistance head-on. While change is never easy, especially in large institutions, entrenched resistance poses an extraordinary barrier to real progress here. There is no better illustration of this than the administrative turmoil enveloping the district right now, the foreseeable results of which are likely to be disastrous for students, as well as for Newtown's committed educators and for the cause of progress.

My strongly held view continues to be that Board leadership must have the courage to immediately and comprehensively address legitimate, well-known concerns, while also holding to account all contributors to administrative dysfunction. I believe a failure to do so now risks lasting harm to public education in Newtown.

I would like to take this final opportunity to wish the entire Board the very best going forward. It has been a pleasure to serve alongside all of you, and with our Superintendent, Chris Melillo. I am grateful for the collegiality, friendship, and patience, and I remain hopeful that together you will find the strength and the courage to do what is right for Newtown's future, no matter how hard it may be. I will be cheering for your success.

A final personal note of appreciation for my dear friend and talented colleague, Shannon Tomai. We began our unlikely journey of service on the Board of Education together, and I have been blessed with the good fortune to learn from her and to sit by her side at Board meetings. I will miss that seat greatly.

Best Wishes,

Todd

2024-25 Municipal Budget

LC Finance Committee Questions

25. Why do some outside agencies pay more for health insurance benefits than others (Page 298 of the BOS budget book).

No particular reason. It has just been past practice. Goes back a while.

26. What Newtown Underwater Search & Rescue's positive cash flow balance was in the 2022-23 fiscal year.

They had \$3,000 left in their medical physical account and \$800 left in their utilities account.

27. Request clarification on the capital reimbursement line in the proposed 2024-25 budget. What is this for and is it one-time revenue?

Not sure what you mean? Please give me a page reference.

Alex Villamil
11 Antler Pine Road
Sandy Hook

In Favor of maintaining the BOE budget at the level determined by the BOE.

The issue of cutting the BOE budget is not as simple as the detractors would indicate. It's not about mandating our BOE to slash its budget by an arbitrary number that does not meet its actual needs and not expect detrimental consequences to occur. We ask for high standards yet we are not willing to invest in obtaining those those high standards. Nobody wants to pay more taxes, however, the economic realities of meeting the demands of our schools and its students, in a post covid world, determine the necessary expenses that the BOE has to incur. That is the reality.

There are rises in costs due to inflation, also legislative mandates that require our schools to "meet the needs of every student." Special needs students costs have gone up. Like it or not that is a reality that needs to be met. Beyond that, there are contractual costs that the schools have with our teachers, benefits and transportation contracts that have risen, as cost have inevitably risen for any entity, dealing with the costs of doing business.

In this case, the business is educating our children. It can not be allowed to fail. Unless we are willing to harm our students by cutting the budget, which would mean cutting faculty, services, and programs.

We need hold the line on a budget that has already been slashed by the BOF and perhaps consider increasing it to a level closer to what the BOE originally requested.

The school has a duty to educate the children of this town, every town in the surrounding area has come across this challenge and voted to increase its BOE budget. Likewise, this community, this legislative body, has a duty to support its schools and the students in our town. Doing anything less is tantamount to failing our kids and utterly unacceptable.

I hope that the Legislative Council sees the wisdom in maintaining a high premium on educating our kids and realizing that that high premium or high expectations require high investments. Support the BOE and the budget that they presented.