



TOWN OF NEWTOWN

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL Education Committee

Minutes

The Education Committee of the Legislative Council held a regular meeting on March 11, 2024, in the Shared Meeting Room #1 at 7:00 pm at the Municipal Center, 3 Primrose Street, Newtown, CT.

Members Present - Ben Ruben, Jennifer Nicoletti, Jill Solderholm, Jordana Bloom, Eric Paradis,

Guests - Alison Plante, Board of Education Chair, Chris Melillo, Superintendent of Schools

Public - two members of the public

No voter comment

Unanimous approval of the 3-5-24 minutes

Discussion of Proposed Board of Education budget

- Communications
 - Ben Ruben emailed two lists of questions, one from himself and the other from Jen Nicoletti (attached)
 - BoE Chair emailed response on definitions of major/minor incidents
- Staffing questions from previous meeting - Superintendent provided a 10 year look back on teachers and admin levels
 - Questions on levels of staffing, can an outside agency evaluate if we are right sized
 - Several groups do this, cost not budgeted, would take a year or more to do and implement any recommendations
 - Comments that increases are unsustainable over time for tax payers
 - Comments that budget should be tied to external staffing reviews
 - HS levels - increasing ECE offerings, AP offerings. HS teachers teach 5 courses.
- Current HS students include children who were at SHS on 12/14. Maintaining a high level of mental health staff this year and next year.
- Question on non-certified staff. Superintendent noted the levels are in the current budget book.
- DRG questions - Superintendent noted that the state has not updated them in a while, thinks we would be in DRG C now due to increased levels of student need in the district, increasing number of students who are multi-lingual learners.
- Discussion on Dean positions
 - increasing time to investigate things that are happening outside of school, esp cyberbullying and Title IX
 - Allows the APs to focus on teaching and learning.
- Attendance and Engagement issues
 - Working with EdAdvance to create a manufacturing program, collaborating with a program in Bethel. Lots of job openings for highly technical positions that are going unfilled.
 - Want to increase opportunities for HS kids to earn credentials, including AA degrees.

- TAP was redesigned to allow students to engage in clubs, sports. Increasing use of internships for TAP students
- Question on BoE increasing the budget
 - Supported by the Superintendent
 - BoE chair noted that the BoE increased the budget to support the Superintendent's vision.
 - Deans will allow Admin to focus more on teaching and learning through "Learning Walks" as ways to improve instruction
 - Student behavior and the resulting investigations are lengthy and taking away from Admin ability to engage in the "Learning Walks"
 - BCBA - one shared between 4 elementary, added position will help with behavioral instruction for students with disabilities, hoping to increase ability to allow students to remain in their home school.
- Question on what cuts would be made if BoF recommendations were passed
 - Superintendent noted that his team and the BoE would have to determine those cuts, nothing has been decided at this point
 - Rationale for the increase is clearly stated and was discussed at BoE public meetings
- Questions on Kindergarten Age change
 - Expensive for the district and for parents
 - Creating a program for students who are not K ready
 - Moving a K teacher to Pre-K for this need
 - Increasing numbers of students being identified with a developmental delay
- Right to Reading
 - Aggressive timeline
 - District is including up to grade 6 to ensure student success
 - New curriculum must be purchased from a short list approved by the State BoE
- Air quality testing may cost up to \$250k every 5 years.
 - all building tested every 5 years, at once, cannot spread them out
 - did not get a timeline as to when it is starting
- Question on not following certain mandates
 - District would lose significant funding from the SDE
- Question on district wide assessments (iReady testing)
 - provides immediate feedback to the schools
 - teachers can adjust lessons immediately based on data
- Questions on truancy and interventions
 - Chronic absenteeism - 10+ absences
 - Prior to pandemic, 4.4% truant. Now, 10%
 - Similar to rest of state and nation
 - Reviewed interventions programs, use of School Social Workers and Admin
 - Reviewed in-district engagement programming, there are private agencies that could help, at a significant cost
 - Reviewed Dean positions and differences between NMS and NHS
 - Can Principals explain how these positions can move the needle (see BoE video presentations for each school online)
 - Elementary schools share one SW FTE
- Question on lunch balances
 - only families qualified for Free/Reduced lunch now get it
 - Superintendent will share those numbers
- Questions on Nixon Consulting and DEI initiatives
 - Ensuring school is safe and engaging for all students

- Teaching students to be respectful and to avoid negative behaviors
 - Nixon hired to help district build capacity, no district FTE involved
 - See Fed 22nd BoE presentation
- Questions on Blue Ribbon and Schools of Distinction status.
 - Superintendent explained the application process
- Motions
 - Motion made by J. Bloom to recommend the LC accept the BoF recommendation to move funds to capital/non-recurring. No second, motion failed.

No other action was taken on recommendations to the full Legislative Council
No voter comment, meeting adjourned.

Submitted by Eric Paradis, Education Chair

Attached:

B Ruben email of his questions

B Ruben email of J. Nicoletti's questions



Eric Paradis <ericp4newtown@gmail.com>

Questions for the BOE Budget 2024-2025 Second Email

Ben Ruben <benruben.newtown@gmail.com>

Mon, Mar 11, 2024 at 3:41 PM

To: Eric Paradis <ericp4newtown@gmail.com>

Eric

Please find my questions attached to this email.

Could you please get these questions answered by Mrs. Plante or Mr. Melillo in a timely manner.

Could you please also add these to the minutes of our March 11, 2024 LC Education Committee meeting.

Thanks,

Ben Ruben

Vice-Chair LC Education Committee



Questions BOE Budget 2024-2025 BR.pdf

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Eric Paradis <ericp4newtown@gmail.com>

Questions for BOE Budget 2024-2025

1 message

Ben Ruben <benruben.newtown@gmail.com>
To: Eric Paradis <ericp4newtown@gmail.com>

Mon, Mar 11, 2024 at 2:18 PM

Eric

Here are questions submitted by Jennifer Nicoletti.

Could you please get these questions answered by Mrs. Plante or Mr. Melillo in a timely manner.

Could you please also add these to the minutes of our March 11, 2024 LC Education Committee meeting.

Thanks,
Ben Ruben
Vice-Chair LC Education Committee



Questions BOE Budget 2024-2025.pdf
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Questions relating to BOE Budget 2024-2025 (from Ben Ruben)

1. What percentage of the whole BOE Budget is related to salaries and benefits?
2. We are carrying the highest level of staff district wide since 2017 (budget chart only goes back to 2017-2018) with the enrollment percentages listed below why are we carrying so much staff? Has the district performed any benchmarking on staffing levels across functions? Teachers, administrators, admin support, student to staff ratios?
 - Elementary enrollment is down 5% since 2013
 - Reed enrollment is down 11% since 2017
 - Middle school enrollment is down 17% since 2017
 - High School enrollment is down 22% since 2017
 - Staffing for Newtown Public Schools is UP 5%
3. As listed in the BOE Budget 2024-2025 in the “Key Drivers” section we have drivers listed as Salaries, Benefits, Supplies, Purchased Property Services, Other Purchased Services and Property Equipment. If staffing levels are at an all time high and 2 out of the 6 “Key Drivers” are Salaries and Benefits would this not warrant an Independent Staff Study?
4. How do you know when you have enough staff and conversely, how do you know when you don't have enough staff?
5. We are already spending more money than our district comparators, can you please explain how spending more money on staff is going to help here in Newtown?
6. This budget is really the same as last year with incremental changes, why would you expect different results this year?
7. Are there investments that we should be making that we aren't that are not included in this budget?
8. Do you believe that there are existing resources that could and should be reallocated?
9. Can you tell us where this current budget reflects conscious choices to reduce spending in some areas (not talking about retirees and then you replace them) areas, for example, where you feel you don't need to spend this much money, because it wasn't working, you needed the money elsewhere, or were seeing a better return, or you have prioritized other?
10. When the council asked last year about re-attaining blue ribbon schools, and you answered “working on it” please tell us what you have done to accomplish that?

Questions relating to BOE Budget 2024-2025 (from Jen Nicoletti)

1) In the DRG B Districts, 18 of 20 other schools spend less per pupil than Newtown. All 20 have higher student/teacher ratios, and 11 are outperforming us in reading while 9 are outperforming us in math. Do we have compiled year over year data that directly correlates staffing levels and enrollment with outcomes?

2) With many current needs being articulated as a direct result of the pandemic, can we quantify what progress has been made in addressing learning loss in math & reading and can we estimate a timeline in which we expect most students to be caught up?

3) Can we get a breakdown of all school-based staff who are tasked and 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?

4) A. 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?

B. There is also a \$60,300 increase in staff training for the Superintendent's office. It is noted as Nixon Consulting training. How many FTE's does this cover and can you give more specifics regarding the intended learning and how the courses will be attended?