

**Legislative Council**  
**Education Sub-committee**

Special meeting minutes

Tuesday March 28,2023

Present: Phil Carroll, William DeRosa, Michelle Embree Ku, Angela Curie, Lisa Kessler, Dan Honan, Jeff Capeci, Deborra Zukowski, Christopher Melillo, Tanja Gouveia, Don Ramsey, one member of the press one member of the public

Call to order: Mr Carroll called the meeting to order at 7:02 pm.

Salute to the flag:

There was much discussion on the Questions and answers that Will be attached.

There were additional questions submitted but too late for the BOE to reply so they will be sent out at a later date.

There may be an additional meeting TBD.

Adjournment: Meeting was adjourned at 8:55 PM



What will become of the classrooms currently Hawley school students are using at HOM, SHS and Reed schools?

At HOM specials teachers (Art, Music, and/or PE) were displaced to allow room for the move. These classrooms will return to specials rooms. In other cases, areas designated for office spaces or common spaces were transformed into classrooms and now they will return to office space and common space.

At SH School: Pre K classrooms will return to Sandy Hook School.

At Reed School: Our classrooms will return to the Blue House where Hawley currently is. We have SPED Teachers who are sharing rooms and two using workrooms. Additionally, the Math Specialist will return to having a classroom to provide services for students. Project Challenge will have a classroom again as they used the conference room to service kids, which is needed for parent meetings, PPTs and 504s. Lastly, UA Teachers who gave up their spaces for Hawley will now have classroom space, which is needed, instead of using a shared space, i.e., Project Adventure and their gym.

2 Did the district offer an early retirement incentive to teachers last year? Will it this year? This program has realized savings when used in prior years.

The district offered an early retirement incentive package two years ago. The net savings realized from the early retirees was \$643,271. However, it's important to keep in mind that each year we budget for certified turnover which is shown as a negative line item in our budget. It's equally as important to understand that in addition to retiree turnover, we also experience unanticipated turnover and in some cases, the replacement cost may exceed the leave. In the year that the early retirement package was offered, we had budgeted \$550,000 for turnover and the actual savings came in at \$623,000

3 Does the district ever give mid year salary increases to personnel that is not budgeted? If so, when was the last example of this, who received them, what was the amount of the increase and what was the salary pre and post -increase?

The only time this would ever happen is if there were a job reclassification which is rare. Union and Non-Union employees are governed by contract, which have a start date of July 1 and end date of June 30th.

7 The superintendent proposed reducing Paras and sending them to where they are needed more with the sped classes Why did the boe over rule this when clearly the enrollment is flat or still reducing and the numbers show the need in sped classes?

The district was able to reduce 2 (.4FTE) teaching positions by shifting enrichment classes to the library media specialist. The BOE had concerns about how the increased caseload to the library media specialists would impact the ability of the media centers to run efficiently.

8 Test scores are still down especially in core subjects and lower than some of our neighboring towns. Would it be wiser to re-evaluate for example the K 6 language arts program that meets every 7 days? Between planned days off and other issues this can go to 14 days at times.

Students in grades 3 through 8 are tested annually in the core subjects of English language arts (ELA) and math. Due to the pandemic, results were not made available in 20-21 and there was no test in 19-20. When comparing results from 21-22 to the last available data from 18-19, test scores are actually trending up in both ELA and Math. The district performs better than some neighboring districts and worse than others. In some cases, performance was better in one subject than a neighboring town and worse in the other. The district sets goals to achieve continuous improvement and therefore prefers to compare its results to its own prior performance.

While K-6 schools operate on a 6-day cycle and the middle school on a 7-day cycle, all students in Kindergarten through grade 8 have English language arts and math daily without exception.

9 Transportation-Have you put any planning to returning to a three tier system that is less expensive, needs less buses and drivers? The experiment running the two-tier system is a failure and is too costly Some children get to sleep an extra 15 minutes while other children do not get picked up for school.

The BOE approved a two tier bussing system after over two years of extensive science-based research. According to the CDC, not getting enough sleep is common among high school students and is associated with several health risks including being overweight, drinking alcohol, smoking tobacco, and using drugs, as well as poor academic performance. One of the reasons adolescents do not get enough sleep is early school start times. The American Academy of Pediatrics has recommended that middle and high schools start at 8:30 a.m. or later to give students the opportunity to get the amount of sleep they need, but most American adolescents start school too early. Moving back to a 3 tier system would mean that the secondary students would need to start earlier, as sports, activities and magnet school alignment would not allow a later start time. This according to medical experts would be detrimental to student learning.

4-Do the bus credits (\$261,820 and \$9,079) reduce the amount to ast? If not where is this money being applied?

The amount of \$261,820 was credited to the 21-22 budget year and captured in our overall year-end balance. At that time, we had 9 buses that were not running combined with additional daily runs and the credit was applied to our transportation line each month. This credit was last year's budget; therefore having no impact on the current year or next year's budget.

*Bus drivers grants were paid from savings*

15 Is your budget based on zero built up to needs/cost. or based on the last years -plus → revenue available to spend?

The 23-24 budget is the second year of using a zero-based budget planning approach. Each principal/director created their budgets by focusing on and analyzing their department needs. In the past, the district used an allotment method; however, this method is typically used for smaller districts and it was decided that building our budget from the ground up and basing our requests on needs would be fiscally more responsible.

*College Grant  
HEK  
Health*

16 How much is spent on CRT, DEI, & SEL?

The district does not teach CRT and no funds are spent on it.

The district has been implementing SEL for more than 10 years and it comes in many forms. Developmental guidance lessons, Project Adventure, Second Step, Responsive classroom, advisory lessons, English-language learner support, all help support the development of our students' social and emotional learning. All of these supports have been in place for many years and none of them have an impact on the 23-24 budget.

The district is currently contracting with an outside consultant to assist with the district's efforts in the areas of diversity, equity, accessibility and inclusion. The cost for that support is being entirely paid for through a grant. The current cost of this work is \$48,000.

17-How much is spent on library books, including the online Follet Destiny library?

*used to check out electronic books*

The district spends roughly \$1,500 per school on Follet and replacement books can average anywhere between \$10-10K annually depending on needs and or replacements.

The evaluation process has the potential to help move teachers along the path to exemplary practice and raise student achievement by clearly defining excellent practice and results; giving accurate, useful information about teachers' strengths and areas for development; while providing opportunities for growth and recognition. This premise for evaluation and support recognizes that our teachers are hard-working professionals who are in the profession to help children learn and grow.

21 What happens with the older technology when it is replaced? Can it be repurposed or sold?

Technology that is end of life (e-Waste) is recycled appropriately by a 3rd party vendor. We do reach out to companies that purchase end of life equipment. However, most of our eWaste has no value due to its condition or age. Equipment with value is collected and sold to companies that mostly specialize in parts. Payment is typically in the form of a credit with that vendor to purchase parts for current equipment in need of repair.

22 I do not see sped money from the state included in the budget book what is that amount and will it reduce the existing budget total?

The excess cost grant is applied directly to the special education out-of-district tuition costs. Page 132 of the budget book displays the amount that is used to offset the tuition costs. *pg 132*

23 Is the health and wellness coordinator (coming off a grant) essential? Or is it possible to delay this non-academic position?

This position was lost in 2016. It was noticed by many that when the position was eliminated, Newtown Public Schools lost the ability to consistently connect and align with the town services that are provided to the community. Also, the position ensures that programming is aligned throughout our 7 schools.

She develops and oversees wellness programs and initiatives, creates and rolls out health-based activities and responds when necessary to health crises. They are active in developing nutrition and physical activity programs. As much as subject-matter educators shape a child's mind, a school wellness coordinator shapes a child's health and wellness and teaches them how to make healthy lifestyle choices. School wellness coordinators set a school or school district's wellness policy, champion wellness programs and the importance of physical education, and coordinate school- or district-wide health initiatives. She collaborates with health-oriented community agencies and organizations, to ensure the district is implementing best practices in health and safety. She works with the school nurses to develop preventive health programs, such as nutrition, vaccination or fitness plans.

Why are we adding social workers coming off grants while the enrollment is still flat or decreasing?

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all stakeholders throughout the PreK-12 public educational system. School social workers have been called upon to provide a continuum of support to students, their families and educational communities who are struggling with increased physical, emotional, and mental health needs such as job loss, death of family members or loved ones, and ongoing uncertainty and instability. School social workers are also assisting their communities by bringing specialized skills in networking and resource procurement to those who are dealing with social isolation. Additionally, school social workers are critical points of contact within a school district offering support to teachers and school staff who must address their own needs and distress. School social workers are uniquely trained to navigate the myriad of issues resulting from this health crisis and are prepared to meet the increased demands for services.

The impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic has created needs in all areas of the lives of students and their families. For example as families struggle with loss of income, there is elevated household stress, often less food available, and intensifying anxiety. School social workers are trained to address student's readiness for education by mitigating the traumatic impact of this crisis on mental health and the disruption of education in the foreseeable future by helping families find food, secure safe and suitable housing, and meeting basic needs. The reality is that school social workers will be continuing to address these needs long after students have returned to school.

As highlighted in question 27, (*"I have heard that at times the sped students assault the teachers or paras..."*) We are seeing more and more dysregulation of our students post pandemic. As such it is manifesting in disruptive behaviors.

25 What is the static of the Hawley HVAC grant?

We are still awaiting for the State of Connecticut to award grants to districts.

26 Do you anticipate any reduction in the \$180k cost for outside agency behavioral therapy next year?

We do anticipate a reduction in this line item as we will continue to seek in-house behavioral therapists to fill the open positions. We will continue to advertise for these positions and have set aside approximately \$60k in our IDEA grant to provide for these outside services if needed.

**Subject:** Question from LC Education Committee

**From:** Michelle Embree Ku <michelleku.newtown@gmail.com>

**Date:** 3/28/2023, 9:43 PM

**To:** Philip Carroll <ppcarroll13@gmail.com>

**CC:** "cc: Christopher Melillo" <melilloc@newtown.k12.ct.us>, Tanja Gouveia <vadast@newtown.k12.ct.us>, Deborra Zukowski <zukowskid\_boe@newtown.k12.ct.us>

Phil,

This is my question for the BOE/Superintendent:

Page 155 of the BOE Budget Book indicates that there is a \$22,288 increase requested for Security Staff and that this includes an increase in hours for school security guards who are assigned to traffic duty. Is this due to temporary changes in traffic patterns, or will this be a longer term shift?

Thank you,  
Michelle