

Please Note: These minutes are pending Board approval.
Board of Education
Newtown, Connecticut

Minutes of the Board of Education budget workshop on January 28, 2020, at 7:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers at 3 Primrose Street.

M. Ku, Chair	L. Rodrigue
D. Delia, Vice Chair	A. Uberti
D. Cruson, Secretary	R. Bienkowski
D. Leidlein (7:05 p.m.)	18 Staff
J. Vouros	1 Press
R. Harriman-Stites (7:05 p.m.)	10 Public
D. Zukowski	

Mrs. Ku called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Item 1 – Pledge of Allegiance

Item 2 – Public Hearing on 2020-2021 Budget (none)

Item 3 – First Read of Grade 4 Math Curriculum

Math/Science Specialists Chris Feda, Jill Bracksieck, Amy Hiruo and Chrissie Pierce presented an overview of the grade four math curriculum.

Dr. Rodrigue thanked them for their effort in coordinating the math curriculum and the long hours of work.

Mr. Delia asked how this ties into the Reed School curriculum.

Mrs. Feda said they brought this to the district math committee which included Reed teachers. We looked at the jumps between grade levels.

Mrs. Bracksieck said they worked with Jess Fonovic and Ellen Buckley at Reed to align the curriculum with that school.

Mr. Delia asked what role coaching plays in this curriculum.

Mrs. Pierce said we will be having professional development with someone from the State who also be at Reed. This consistent focus will help us going into the classrooms and helping teachers.

Mrs. Hiruo said we have been looking at everything, learning targets, and progressing a little at a time.

Mrs. Uberti said the process hasn't gone in the typical order. There is a lot of professional development on teaching standards. The State adopted Stepping Stones. We are identifying gaps in instruction but it's not a brand new curriculum.

Mrs. Zukowski asked when and how they would evaluate the success of the program.

Mrs. Feda said we have had a resource in place for six years. We look at the modules and also use NWEA and IAB which are data points to determine the success of our instruction. Classrooms teachers can look at that data.

Mr. Vouros asked them to explain that the children can monitor their own process in certain assessments.

Mrs. Feda said when the older students take the NWEA they are more keenly aware of the scores on the screen.

Mrs. Leidlein asked when the elementary students start making the connection between math and science.

Mrs. Bracksieck said we ensure that it happens. We are able to build more math into the science.

Mrs. Feda said it is even happening at the kindergarten level.

Item 4 – Discussion and Possible Action on Programming for At-risk Middle School Students

Dr. Rodrigue spoke about the having the SAIL program in the middle school. We felt we truly needed this at the high school and it was critical for the 15 students who stay in the program most of the day. It is personalized to the learner. We are finding that students coming from Reed to the middle school are experiencing the same kinds of concerns. With this program in the middle school we are also adding a health and wellness component. We were looking at a regionalized program for this group of students but it doesn't look like it will materialize. If we had a grade seven through 12 program other districts might send their students to us. The cost would be \$36,000 for the remainder of this year and we would give a stipend to the health and wellness teacher at the middle school. It would cost \$36,000 for the half year hiring a 1.0 FTE special education teacher and having a stipend to cover the health and wellness component with existing staff.

Tom Einhorn stated that we tried to find options for students who are struggling and would like to keep them in our building instead of being out-placed.

Dr. Rodrigue mentioned that if two students were not out-placed we would save \$120,000.

Mrs. Petersen stated that students we identified for this program have been dysregulated throughout the year and staff has worked to provide their education but we are at a standstill. We want to keep them in the district.

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved that the Board of Education expand the high school SAIL program to the middle school for the remainder of the year with a health/wellness component, and continue as a permanent in-house special education program moving forward. Mrs. Harriman-Stites seconded.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites asked about space for this program in the middle and high schools and that it was important for people to understand the importance of this program.

Dr. Rodrigue said the high school space is in the former Nurtery space and a classroom.

Mr. Einhorn said with the proposed reduction in staff we look to have two spaces for this program.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites said that schools throughout the region have programs like this. This could be a potential revenue stream and she appreciated pulling it together.

Mrs. Petersen heard the same thing from area directors to come look at our programs beside SAIL. The goal is to always keep students in district.

Mr. Cruson asked the timeline for starting the program this year.

Mrs. Petersen said that if approved we would post the position tomorrow.

Mrs. Hall said we also have mental health staff working with the students and feels confident with the staff in place now.

Dr. Rodrigue said it was helpful that the model exists now. If approved, the middle school health teacher will take the stipend for the health and wellness component.

Mrs. Zukowski asked the difference between the Flex program at the high school and the SAIL program.

Mrs. Petersen said the Flex program is not for special education students.

Dr. Rodrigue said they are regular education students who also have anxieties or are out for medical issues so they have the flexibility of moving back to the regular school schedule.

Mrs. Leidlein was concerned if we are asking for enough resources and if we are considering other students to join the program.

Mrs. Hall said there could be but a few are out-placed but may be able to return. She was not sure when the decision would be made.

Mrs. Zukowski said that keeping students in the district is best for everyone but feels we need a plan with all expected costs and tuition from other districts may come in with a return on our investment. She referred to the EdAdvance model of having a program at Chalk Hill School and asked if we could use money from the special education fund.

Dr. Rodrigue said that Chalk Hill School would be an out-placement for us. Now we are looking at an internal model. EdAdvance didn't get to the developmental place so it doesn't exist. We have the need here which is why we are looking at our internal model.

Mrs. Ku said it was an idea for EdAdvance but they had to rely on State money so it will not happen this or next year.

Dr. Rodrigue said we do evaluate the program at the high school and that many of those 15 students weren't even coming to school.

Mrs. Zukowski was more comfortable solving the immediate problem and talking more about a real program to be a long-term success. This is too short a time to design a whole program.

Mrs. Petersen said we have had this program for four years and it's been very successful. Districts have looked here but no one has sent students. We have a transition program at the Community Center. She always shares programs with other districts. The programs we have are for our students but if there is space for other students we would consider that and model it like the high school program.

Motion passes unanimously.

Item 5 – Budget Discussion

Mr. Cruson asked for details on a proposal for the K-4 schedule.

Dr. Rodrigue said that the discussion of a potential change in the schedule has nothing to do about rearranging music. We have a program in the arts that encourages engagement and curiosity. We have to look at the big picture and shared a typical schedule for an elementary student. Content areas could have a variety of classes. Spanish is wedged in to the day. She also shared a typical art and music schedule. We want a teacher to be in one school.

Dr. Rodrigue explained the music reduction and said they wanted to make sure there was equity between all teachers. We looked at a schedule change because we were finding that science was lacking in the schedule. We have to have balance. It is discouraging that you can't fit in what the State requires. In a six-day rotation you won't lose instruction.

Mr. Cruson asked if there was consideration to lengthening each special period by five or ten minutes.

Mrs. Uberti said that could be a consideration. Spanish is a piece of this so it's an additional 30 minutes out of instructional time. Moving to a six-day schedule there is space for Spanish. It gives us flexibility and we have to stay within the State guidelines. If we add time to the specials we will take minutes away from other instruction.

Dr. Rodrigue said the six-day rotation will allow teachers to fit in what they need to fit in.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites said other districts have been using a six-day schedule and she felt it would be helpful to have information from them to see how it's working. She is concerned about reductions in the music program and wanted to look at cuts to the art program. There are some parental concerns about this. Art shows have been really diminished and climate in the schools has been affected because there is no art teacher and asked if there has been a marked impact on visual arts with this change.

Michelle Hiscavich said the student load for some art teachers teaching in two schools has been very high. The loss of not being in a building all the time limits working with a variety of students. The teachers may not be there on staff meeting day, picture days or for professional development.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites asked if we move to the six-day rotation would it fix some of these issues. Mrs. Uberti stated that they would have more free time.

Mrs. Zukowski said that creative arts are a huge part of being successful and asked if this level of instruction was enough.

Ms. Hiscavich said the State requires 90 minutes for general music. Students in art are strong in the sciences and we are facing how to fit it all in.

Mrs. Leidlein asked for a breakdown of how the elementary Spanish program has progressed and what it is projected to cost next year.

Mr. Bienkowski said we don't account for it that way.

Mrs. Uberti said it's in the curriculum budget for two elementary teachers. The Reed Spanish teacher is in the Reed budget. The cost has been minimal.

Mrs. Leidlein asked if some of the money spent on the SAIL Program could be recouped from the possibility that we won't out-place many students.

Mr. Bienkowski doesn't think it will happen for this year but for next year we would calculate that and apply for it.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites was concerned about not having enough funding for professional development for regular classroom teachers and other staff to be able to recognize signs of distress.

Dr. Rodrigue said there is some funding from grants and we are looking at professional development needs.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites asked for a budget number for the cost to meet those needs.

Dr. Rodrigue said not all of what we are thinking about is in the budget.

Mrs. Zukowski referred to her questions on the technology budget.

Mrs. Amodeo said we look at obsolete equipment before we make purchases. The number of devices exceeds the number of staff and elementary students but teachers have a laptop and iPad when needed. Also, staff members may have a Chromebook to take to meetings.

Mr. Delia questioned the use of our maintenance staff for projects and if they were accurately estimating the building and site repairs and emergency repairs with this method using our people and asked if those numbers should be smaller.

Mr. Bienkowski said this entire budget is \$244,000 less than last year. The biggest unknowns are emergency repairs and building and site repairs that are unpredictable.

Mr. Delia asked for the actual costs year to date for emergency repairs and for building and site repairs.

Item 6 – Public Participation

Stephen St. Georges, 21 Great Hill Road, spoke about the impact of reducing music classes. He is a music teacher and was reduced and split between buildings. It has a severe impact on building climate as a whole. Any teacher less than full time is marginalized and it's hard to connect with students and staff. He doesn't mind paying more taxes to see our teachers used in a building. He likes the six-day schedule and wants to keep the teachers in one building.

Melissa Beylouni, 15 Equestrian Ridge, is co-president of the middle school PTA and saw a tremendous difference when an art teacher was shared between schools. The teacher was stressed out and didn't have time to know the children. We live for the art shows but they were impacted. She would hate for that to happen with the music program. Art and music are releases for the students to be creative.

MOTION: Mr. Cruson moved to adjourn. Mrs. Harriman-Stites seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Item 7 – Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Daniel J. Cruson, Jr.
Secretary

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