

WINDHAM BOARD OF EDUCATION
WILLIMANTIC, CONNECTICUT
BOARD OF EDUCATION SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
MARCH 2, 2016

BOARD PRESENT: Chair Mrs. Osuba, Vice-chair Dr. Sewall, Secretary Dr. Gomez, Mr. Kalajian, Mrs. Lambert, Mr. Montalvo, Mr. French, Mr. Flores-Alvarez,

BOARD ABSENT: Mr. Quamme

ADMINISTRATION

PRESENT: Superintendent Dr. Garcia, Interim Assistant Superintendent Mr. Chaffin, Interim Assistant Superintendent Dr. Hebert, Directors: Ms. Beghetto, Ms. Markey and Mr. Johnson

STUDENT

REPRESENTATIVES: None

OTHERS PRESENT: General public, staff, administrators, news media

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Mrs. Osuba called the March 2, 2016 Board of Education special meeting to order at 7:00 P.M. in the Windham High School Library Media Center.

PLEDGE OF ALLIANCE

Mr. Kalajian led the Board and the Public in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

PROPOSED 2016-2017 SCHOOL BUDGET PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

Mrs. Osuba reminded everyone that the meeting agenda provides for a presentation of the budget only and there would be no voting this evening.

Dr. Garcia thanked everyone for attending this evening's session. She presented the budget to the Board of Education. She reviewed the guiding principles in the preparation of the school budget. All students should have access to a quality education. The vision is to have every student in the classroom every day. Dr. Garcia then reviewed the Theory of Action and its five strategies. There are only four goals for the district at this time. The goals are focused on students, staff, parent and community involvement, and facilities.

Enrollment is increasing in the District and the needs are also increasing. There has been a tremendous amount of effort made to manage special education and ELL because these areas are crucial and affect the budget. The Superintendent reviewed the budget priorities which are: expand college learning opportunities for all high school students, develop social studies and science curriculum MAPS, develop an international baccalaureate program, redesign the

District's bilingual program, implement a musical instrument program at the elementary level, and build teacher and administrator capacity.

There are four core strategies that will be supported by the budget: provide students with equitable access to a rigorous instructional program; build staff capacity to assure student growth and achievement; provide opportunities for families to be actively engaged in schools; and create a culture of efficiency.

The budget is funded through three sources: local funding, State of CT funding, and, lastly, state and federal grants. The total amount of the budget is \$61,403,160. 81.7% of the budget goes to support the schools; 18.3% goes to central services. Dr. Garcia reviewed the cost drivers of the budget. The highest cost driver is contractual salaries. The second is tuition followed by transportation and maintenance. There will be a decrease in benefit costs this year created by savings on health benefits, workers compensation and pension contributions. Proposed reductions in the budget are composed of the loss of one administrative and two non-certified staff members. There will be an increase in certified staff in music, bilingual, math and workplace learning. Not one teaching position has been cut.

Dr. Garcia thanked all staff and principals who attended this evening's presentation and have provided budget information and assistance.

Mr. Johnson reviewed in depth some of the budget line items that would be increasing this year. Tuition remained steady for this budget year. The revenue will be stable this year also.

Mr. French inquired as to how the health benefits were calculated and Mr. Johnson said that the provider gave a projection that was used in the budget. Mr. French asked how past decisions had impacted the budget this year. Mr. Johnson said that he has not projected any extra monies for workers' compensation saving because he is building a reserve. Funding for non-certified pensions has been diversified for a better rate of return so that the District does not need to contribute as much. All of the new retirees are paid out of the diversified fund and the past retirees are paid out of funds already set aside for that purpose.

Mr. French asked about the special education program that brought students back to the District. Dr. Garcia advises that the programs at the high school and middle school are working very well but it is impossible to forecast how many special education students will be coming into the district at any given time.

Mrs. Lambert inquired as to the lack of increase in funding in the music department. Dr. Garcia said this is a determination made at the school level. Mrs. Lambert asked about music teachers being cut and was advised that no teachers have been eliminated. Also, she asked about Compañeros being reduced from K-12 to K-8. She was advised that it is a K-8 program. Mr. Johnson advised that there was an issue in reporting the faculty count in the special education and Compañeros programs since, this year the budget is broken down in a different manner. He will clarify in the next iteration of the budget book.

Dr. Sewall asked if the budget showed grant positions. Mr. Johnson indicated that there were positions that were moved to grants. Dr. Sewall said that in order to understand, the Board needs to have the figures which includes grants. Ms. Lambert mentioned that the budget was not yet up on the website.

Ms. Lambert pointed out several other salary line items seemed to be reduced. Mr. Johnson indicated that the funding was moved to grants since the initiatives of the grants support salaries. She also inquired if there are four administrators at the middle school since

there is a reduction showing in the budget. Mr. Johnson confirmed that was correct. Ms. Lambert asked if there was a reduction in Barrows staff and Mr. Johnson said this was also moved to grants. There was a further question regarding the personnel office and Mr. Johnson said they have been moved to the Alliance grant. Mr. Johnson indicated Teach for America is also now covered by a grant. Dr. Garcia indicated that the allocation of expenses provides for an increase of 3%. Mrs. Lambert asked that the board be more thoughtful when moving funds into grant monies. Dr. Sewall said that a three-year plan would be in place to deal with the expiration of grants. Dr. Garcia indicated there was a plan being developed.

Ms. Lambert asked about food services and Mr. Johnson indicated that the department is revenue neutral. Information technology is not allocated out to each school but in the central office budget.

Ms. Lambert questioned Natchaug's utility line item which shows a \$27,000 increase. Mr. Johnson will investigate these figures. She also inquired as to the savings due to the microgrid program at the Middle School. Mr. Johnson said it has not been included. Mr. Kalajian said the microgrid is not on line yet.

Mrs. Osuba asked that Mrs. Lambert e-mail her questions to Mr. Johnson. Mrs. Lambert asked that she be permitted to continue. Mrs. Lambert asked for clarification regarding Barrows utilities. Mr. Johnson and Mr. Donaldson clarified the issue.

Dr. Gomez asked that the board move to public comment in interest of time.

PUBLIC COMMENT COMMENCED AT 8:05 P.M.

Alicia Lynn, parent, indicated that the Connecticut Coalition for Social Justice has a lawsuit pending now that includes Windham Schools. The suit maintains that the formula by which the state appropriates funds to needy communities in grants such as the ECS grant is inequitable. She asked that members of the Board and community rally and inform their legislators of the impact of the imbalanced funding on the education of Windham students.

Kevin Hoxie, parent high school, was concerned that the budget was not on line and available for the public to review prior to tonight's meeting. He asked the Board to come together as one entity which is the only way the budget will pass. He inquired as to the status of the NEASC report and Dr. Garcia informed him that the results are not yet available.

Bill Powers, School Governance Council Windham Center School, stated that he thought the budget priorities are wonderful. The Board has done a fabulous job of defining the needs of the students. He has concerns with regard to the issue of transparency. There was a packet delivered to board members but is not available to the public. There should be supplemental details available so people could better understand the budget. The SGC members did not know how grant monies are allocated to schools and why. Increasing the bilingual staff statement was not clarified and he would like further specifics about staffing and what the program will look like at the school level. At the Board Retreat, the 3% number for the increase of the budget was discussed as a target. Why isn't the budget set to provide for as much money as needed to meet the needs of the students rather than to a specific percentage?

Al Korzenski, SGC member and parent, thanked the people who attended the meeting. He found the budget forums very helpful. As a member of the High School and Middle School SGC's, he informed the Board that today was the first time they saw the budget and that there is a flaw in the process. He felt that he wasted his time if he cannot have input on the budget. If people do not have an opportunity to get the answers to their questions, they may not be

willing to come out in support of the budget. Dr. Garcia clarified that most of the schools followed the procedures and apologized for those schools that did not make the presentation to the SGC.

Kellie Prescott, Chair of the Middle School SGC, indicated that she will not sign off on the budget until there is more information. She said the SGC would like to see one more special education teacher at the middle school. She is concerned about class sizes and, if another teacher is required, it should be included in the budget. There is a difference between the middle school budget presented to the SGC and the proposed budget. She also inquired as to why the position of a Tech Ed teacher for the middle was not replaced. Dr. Garcia indicated that the principal was given the position last year and it was removed and the principal has not asked to have the position replaced this year. Ms. Prescott also expressed her feeling that the budget needed to be as simple as possible for everyone to understand and it should be on line.

Mary Gallucci, parent, feels that the Board needs to work together to move forward. She is also troubled that bills have been presented to the legislature regarding changes to the high school, such as making it a magnet school. There should be input from parents who have students at the school. She indicated there is a need for more world language teachers at the high school level. She also questioned why the substitute teacher service was still being used, as it is not cost efficient. She asked for an explanation of why certain items were reallocated between central services and general education. Mr. Johnson explained that services that are student-based services have been reallocated. She felt that the budget short changes the students.

Jerry Phillips supported things that were said by other speakers. Budget time is a very difficult time in the community and the children are aware of the ongoing discussion. He asks for more narrative around the numbers. How much is mandated and how much is discretionary spending? Since there is so much mandated spending, students do not get the opportunities they deserve. He asked that Board members work as a unified front in order to get the community to support the budget.

James Flores said that the Board's behavior is unbecoming and needs to be adjusted. He indicated that it would be more productive to have discussion and ask questions prior to presenting the budget to the public. He asked if someone would be able to give him the amount of change in the mill rate that would be experienced by the proposed budget.

Susan Collins, co-chair School Governance Council – High School, acknowledged that the budget process is difficult. She believes that renovation of the schools is very important. She said the budget is low and bare. Is the renovation vote impacting the 3% increase? Ms. Collins is concerned that the classes are overcrowded in the high school. Dr. Garcia said there have been no cuts in the teaching positions. Mrs. Collins finds it difficult to believe that there is a presumption that the community will not support a budget with an increase for education. We need to have quality programs to offer to our students in order to have people send their students to the school.

Sandra Ramos feels the budget should be higher. She is in favor of more teachers rather than investing in renovations. She also felt that the meetings need to be more organized so the public can have a better opportunity to present their concerns.

PUBLIC COMMENT ENDED; BOARD DISCUSSION RESUMED

Mrs. Lambert would like a list of positions to be moved to grants since she is concerned about the sustainability of the moving positions to grants. Mr. Johnson will provide the list to the Board. Dr. Garcia confirmed that there always has been a reliance on grants to cover salaries. Dr. Sewall asked for detail information regarding grants to make it easier to compare budgets.

Mrs. Lambert asked that there be a clarification of the enrollment numbers. It was clarified that outplacement and Pre-K were included in one handout. Dr. Garcia will clarify where IC's and coaches are budgeted. Mrs. Lambert asked if the Middle School stipends being cut were an indication that sports were being eliminated. Mr. Johnson indicated this was an error and has been corrected. Dr. Garcia clarified an issue regarding the high school swim team. This program is undersubscribed by students from Windham and the district is investigating the possibility of sharing the cost with other districts that use the program. Dr. Sewall felt that the swim team stipends were a small amount and having the program with other districts was good public relations.

Mrs. Lambert asked how much does the ECO program cost in general. The financing of this program is in part covered by corporate partners and part by the school budget. Mr. Johnson will provide that breakdown.

Dr. Sewall addressed the question from the public regarding the budget and facility plans. He indicated that these matters are separate and apart. The School Planning and Design Committee is working on a plan to renovate the high school which will cost whatever it costs. The operating budget needs to balance the needs of the school with the resources available in the community. Since last year the budget increase was approximately 3%, the discussion was that this year's budget at the same rate of increase would meet the Superintendent's objectives and stay within the ability of the community to support it. The Board has the option to pass a budget that is larger. There are many problems with the cost sharing opportunities from the State.

Dr. Sewall supports the SGC concept and is unhappy that the system did not work for two schools this year. Although these groups are advisory, their input should be weighed heavily during the budget process.

BOARD COMMENTS

Mr. Montalvo congratulated the High School music department for its successful fundraiser. They worked hard to put on a wonderful event and the music was superb.

Mr. French considers this meeting a workshop for the Board of Education. This is the only opportunity to sit down as a board to discuss the budget. SGCs need to see the budget with enough time for review prior to submission of their individual school budgets. The timeframes need to be moved forward to accommodate SGC meetings. He suggested having another meeting where the SGCs can give their input to the Board. Mr. French said that the Board needs to work together.

Mr. Kalajian said that facilities need to be cared for, populated and have programs. There has been issue whether the Board asks for enough in the budget. He knows that the community needs to understand that there is value added in the larger budget. Perhaps there should be a coalition that comes together to devise a plan to have the entire community support a larger budget that does not rely so much on grants.

Mrs. Osuba informed the Board that, if they had additional questions regarding the budget, they should submit them to Dr. Garcia and Mr. Johnson. This is a draft budget and the edited version will be on website by Monday. There was discussion regarding giving the SGC's an opportunity to give input. It was decided that the budget would be taken up at the next regularly scheduled meeting and another meeting can be set if needed.

OPENED TO PUBLIC COMMENT

Al Korzenski endorsed the two principals who did not present their budgets to the SGCs citing inexperience with the system. Dr. Garcia reiterated that the process is intact and that there were explanations as to why the two schools did not comply.

Kellie Prescott wanted to have confirmation that the budget would be available by end of business on Monday. Mr. Johnson stated that the budget timeline would be met. Dr. Sewall said that there is an issue with calendaring now that the finance department of the town and the Board of Education finance department have merged. There have been four budget workshops and forums.

James Flores asked Mr. Johnson to explain what passing the budget would mean to the taxpayers in language that is easy for the general public to understand including mill rate impact. Mr. French said that this information is not available at this time but will be available when the town has completed their budget process.

Dr. Sewall asked whether the budget should be left at 3% or should be increased. There was discussion as to whether there should be an increase in the amount of the budget or, perhaps, have an extra line item on the ballot. The Board will take all of the comments under consideration.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Mr. Flores-Alvarez, seconded by Mr. French, that the Board adjourn its meeting at 10:00PM.

Motion is unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Jaime Gomez, Secretary