

MONROE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Monroe, Connecticut

Budget Workshop
December 9, 2015

Present: Chairman Donna Lane
Secretary Shannon Reilly-Monaco
Board Member Jeff Guttman
Board Member James Martinez
Board Member Jerry Stevens
Board Member Alan Vaglivello

Absent: Vice-Chairman George King III
Board Member Christine Cascella
Board Member Lee Crouch

Also present: Superintendent James Agostine
Assistant Superintendent John Battista
Finance Director Gabriella DiBlasi

Call to Order

Chairman Lane called the workshop to order at 6:30 p.m. and led the Board in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Opening Remarks

Superintendent Agostine said the net savings of the 4.6 FTE staff reduction is \$306,000. Tonight's workshop will cover Special Education, Technology, and Facilities.

Public Participation

There was none at tonight's meeting.

Budget Workshop

Special Education

Kay Moser, Director of Student Support Services, and *Andrea Einhorn*, Assistant Director of Student Support Services, were present at tonight's workshop. There are 378 Special Education students in grades PreK-12; the percentage has decreased due to declining enrollment, but the number of students has been fairly consistent in the Special Education population. The number of referrals has increased over the past two years. Last year, there was a significant number for the preschool, and in the previous year, there was an increase in mental health referrals. There are 13 referrals from the beginning of this school year and 3 have been deemed eligible for services. *Ms. Moser* continued that Special Education offers a lot of transition services at the high school including the unified sports team and vocational training. For those students who can't participate in the work program, there is the Rise Program which is age appropriate for 18-21. *Ms. Moser* added that the number of students participating in that program is increasing, and many of the students who are eligible for services stay on until the age of 21. This is a reason why the enrollment is not going down.

Special Education Budget Drivers include:

- Professional Educational Services/Outside Agencies (IPP, Creative Solutions and CES)
- Tuition Public
- Tuition Private-The reduction was due to the locations of the programs.
- Transportation-The increase was contractual.
- Testing supplies
- Equipment and new instructional equipment was also cut due to a decrease in student specific needs.

Superintendent Agostine noted that the percentage of Special Education students at 11% is relatively low compared to other districts, and outplacements are a relatively small number of students with high level needs. He added that providing the services that all students need is the District's priority.

Assistant Superintendent Battista noted that the 10-month Special Education Secretary position listed under Personnel is not a new position. It previously appeared in the main budget, but it now it is budgeted in Special Education. The secretary's responsibilities include scheduling PPTs, reception and working with the school psychologist on scheduling.

Board Member Martinez asked about referrals; *Ms. Moser* said that they have re-visited the SRBI process. When there is a parent referral, they went to testing, but now they are taking a step back to the SRBI process to get more data before proceeding with an evaluation.

Board Member Vaglivo asked if the District had enough Speech Pathologists. *Ms. Moser* responded that it does and that there are two shared pathologists at Monroe Elementary and Masuk, and Jockey Hollow and Masuk. The total is 5.4 FTE with one being dedicated to the Pre-School who also takes a few Kindergarten students.

Technology

The increase for the proposed 2016-2017 Technology Budget is 0.36%.

The budget drivers are:

- Software Renewals-There is an increase of 26% due to changing the Munis line from Leases to Software Renewals. The other additions are STAR Assessment Software and Smart Notebook Software. *Dr. Zmary* said that SMART, the manufacturer, made a change with licensing for the software that drives the SmartBoards. The software was free when the SmartBoards were initially purchased but now there is an annual renewal fee. He continued that the new projection system from Epson comes with its own software and that it should be a more reliable and cost effective system. In addition, *Dr. Zmary* said that they have eliminated a lot of ineffective software.
- Equipment Repairs-The 11.62% increase is due to SmartBoard repairs for projector and bulb replacement. The cost of the bulbs ranges from \$80-\$200. As the SmartBoards are a primary instruction tool, the replacement bulbs and equipment are necessary. The Equipment Repairs line item also provides fund for School PA system repairs.

- Telephone-Central Office-There was a significant decrease as Town and District phone systems were upgraded in 2015-2016.
- Travel-This is travel for the Techs who travel between the schools and Town buildings. It is a line correction from Travel Tech and has no impact on the budget.
- New Instructional Equipment-The 66% reflects the need for technology refreshes. This year was the first year that all teachers had laptops. The initial purchase of laptops was four years ago for the middle and high school teachers and end of life for laptops is approximately five years. There are 183 teachers at the middle and high school levels and the plan is to start refreshing the inventory next year. *Superintendent Agostine* noted that when Munis was brought in, the \$200,000 line item was created with the idea that the District would fund the program, software, and training and as that cost rolled off, the line item would be maintained to begin the refreshment cycle.
- Leases Computers- There is a decrease of approximately \$9,000. The line was originally intended for technology purchasing. System upgrades have been funded out of this line in the past. Though there is a reduction to this line, a larger percentage, 90%, will be available for instructional technology including the teacher laptops, Student Chrome books, and SmartBoard replacements. "It is not about adding new things, it is about making sure the things we have run the way they should to serve the students and teachers in the classroom."

Facilities

The proposed Facilities Budget for 2016-2017 has a 0% increase.

Facilities Budget Drivers:

- The security line was increased by \$8,500 to reflect ongoing costs to maintain security systems; savings were found in other areas that offset the increase.
- Capital Plan-*Dr. Zmary* said that the oil tanks at Stepney, Monroe Elementary and Masuk need to be replaced. The District is required to replace tanks every 25 years and Stepney, Monroe Elementary are due and though Masuk is not due for 2 more years, it will be more cost effective to bundle all the replacements. The cost of making permanent changes to the traffic pattern at Masuk is approximately \$20,000.
- Equipment Replacement Plan-The Loader and the tractor are in dire need of repair as the cost of repair is no longer cost effective.

Board Member Stevens asked what the additional cost of removing snow was last year, referring to why a new tractor loader is needed. *Ms. DiBlasi* said that the approximate cost was \$20,000.

Superintendent Agostine said that a weak spot of the budget is the medical benefits and workers compensation, as they are based on very early projections. He added that it is possible there could be further staff changes.

Board Member Stevens asked if the early retirement incentive is still being offered; *Superintendent Agostine* said that the deadline was November 15. If a retirement was brought to their attention, it could be honored with a possible penalty. *Assistant Superintendent Battista* added that the other bargaining units do not have to advise the

District this early of an intention to retire, as there is no incentive offer. There is no early retirement incentive for certified staff hired after 2005-2006.

Revenues-*Superintendent Agostine* said that facility use generates approximately \$30,000 in revenue, Intramurals generates \$10,000, Arts/Imagination is \$70,000, Adult Education, and Summer School bring in \$21,000. The Masuk surcharges, Pay to Play, are estimated to generate \$194,000, and Jockey Hollow's revenue from surcharges is estimated to bring in \$36,700. Parking fees will generate about \$27,000; approximately the cost of re-routing the parking lot. *Superintendent Agostine* added that the projected cost of the parking lot project includes stairs for students walking from the junior parking lot.

Board Member Stevens asked about the estimated revenue from Fresh Fest; *Ms. DiBlasi* said that the District does not get revenue from it though sometimes they get donations. *Superintendent Agostine* added that Sodexo had donated much of the food for the event in the past until a concern was publicly raised. *Board Member Guttman* asked if there was a way to vet this properly to determine if the District can accept the food as a gesture, not as an implication for their contract. *Ms. DiBlasi* said if Sodexo chooses to make a donation, it would be out of their fund. It cannot come out of the cafeteria fund, and it cannot be specifically written into the bid. *Board Member Guttman* suggested that we let it be known to the community that we accept donations, and it would make Fresh Fest more of a community effort.

Instructional Supplies-*Assistant Superintendent Battista* said that the budget for instructional supplies came in below budget from last year, but with the addition of the textbooks for the new math program, it is up slightly. The increase for workbooks is \$34,000, though there is a \$134,000 decrease in textbooks and Curriculum.

Superintendent Agostine concluded the workshop by assuring the Board that he will take advantage of any opportunity between now and the budget referendum to reduce the budget. He continued that the District's cost containment initiatives have been effective, and that they are reducing staff commensurate with enrollment decreases. He added that the per pupil expense is \$15,628.86, which is almost directly in the middle of the DRG, while the State average per pupil spending is \$16,240. He stressed the value the District provides with excellent programming, facilities, and extracurricular activities.

The budget will be discussed at the next Board of Education meeting on December 21.

Motion to Adjourn at 7:40 p.m.

Motion: (J. Guttman)

Second: (J. Martinez)

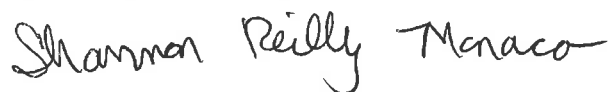
Discussion: None

Motion passed 6 (Lane, Guttman, Martinez, Reilly-Monaco, Stevens and Vaglivello)

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Respectfully Submitted,



Shannon Reilly-Monaco
Board of Education Secretary