

MONROE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Monroe, Connecticut

Budget Workshop
December 12, 2016

Present: Chairman Donna Lane
Secretary Shannon Reilly-Monaco
Board Member James Martinez
Board Member Carlos Reinoso, Jr.
Board Member Jerry Stevens
Board Member Alan Vaglivo

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

Absent: Vice-Chairman George King III
Board Member Christine Cascella
Board Member David Ferris

Pledge of Allegiance

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

Public Participation

There was none at tonight's workshop.

Secretary Reilly-Monaco said that a sixth grade STEM student wrote a letter to the Board thanking them for giving students the chance to learn and grow at the STEM program.

Budget Workshop

Special Education

Ms. Moser provided the Board Members with an overview of the Special Education process:

Child Find

Federal regulations require that the District locate, identify, and evaluate all students birth to age 21 who require Special Education and related services. Referrals are done by a family or their pediatrician to the Birth to Three Process. The Pre-school staff also does outreach to area daycares and preschools in Monroe to discuss the services the District provides and to advise them on what to look for in terms of milestones. The Pre-School

staff also does child specific screening, a parent can also refer a student to the District or the School Team can refer any student at any age from Kindergarten through Grade 12.

There is a specific standard referral form to document all referrals to the Planning and Placement Team and, once the parents and staff complete the form, the District has 45 school or 60 calendar days to review the referral and implement a program if deemed necessary. The referral next goes to the Planning and Placement Team (PPT). It is building based and an administrator, a parent, a regular education teacher, a special education teacher, and a representative from Pupil Services must attend. The PPT Team discusses the referral and decides if an evaluation is needed or if the current regular education program is all that is needed. Parents must sign a consent form for evaluation. Evaluation can include achievement testing, cognitive testing, social behavioral testing, language development, and fine and gross motor skills. Occasionally, outside evaluators are brought into the process. After this initial evaluation is done, the next step is eligibility when the PPT members come back together to discuss the completed evaluations and make the determination if the student has a disability and if they meet the specific criteria that are the guidelines from the Federal Government.

There are 13 disability categories a student can fall under to be eligible for Special Education services. If a student does not meet criteria, the process is concluded. If eligible, an IEP (Individualized Education Plan) is developed. The IEP is individualized for each student and includes the current levels of academic and functional performance has measureable goals and objectives, the accommodations, modifications, and services required to adjust the goals and objectives and the justification for removal from any regular education program. It includes the length of the school day and the school year so if it is determined that a student needs an extended school year it is addressed at the initial IEP.

Transportation concerns are also addressed and if the student is 16 years or older, vocational and transitional concerns are also addressed. *Ms. Moser* continued they always look for the Least Restrictive Environment, where it is the best place to educate the child based on their needs, goals, and objectives. The location can range from regular education with few services to residential placement. She added that the school team develops strategies to keep the student in District whenever possible rather than going to outplacement or residential placement. Placement for Special Education services can only be determined by the PPT and IEP. An IEP is written for one year, and the PPT is reviewed annually to determine a student's progress. At a minimum, IEP is looked at once a year and re-evaluation occurs every three years to make sure they are still eligible. At this time, students who have met their goals and objectives are dismissed from Special Education services. *Board Member Stevens* asked who determines the three year timeframe. *Ms. Moser* said it is a federal regulation.

Ms. Fensore discussed the 13 categories that a student can qualify under and these categories are federally determined.

- **Autism** - Developmental disability affecting verbal and non-verbal communication and social interaction. The District uses the Autism Diagnostic

- Observation. Schedule and there is an eligibility worksheet that needs to be completed.
- **Deaf/Blindness** - Refers to students with both hearing and visual disabilities.
 - **Developmentally Delayed** - This applies to ages three through five with significant delays in one or more areas of development. Students need to be re-classified by their sixth birthday.
 - **Emotional Disturbance** - An inability to learn that can't be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors. There is an eligibility worksheet that needs to be completed.
 - **Hearing Impaired** - If the impairment adversely affects their educational performance, a student can qualify for services.
 - **Intellectual Disability** - The disability must appear before the age of 18, and it must adversely affect the student's educational performance.
 - **Multiple Disabilities** - A combination of disabilities that cause severe educational needs
 - **Orthopedic Impairment** - Physical disabilities which affect the academic process
 - **Other Health Impairment** - Limited strength or alertness due to chronic health problems. ADD/ADHD is a sub-category to distinguish students with ADD/ADHD and other health impairments. A student must first meet the requirements for OHI and then the more specific requirements for ADD/ADHD. Specific Learning Disabilities is also a sub-category, and it is when there is a specific learning disability in one or more of the basic psychological processes. Dyslexia is a sub-category; students first have to meet the criteria of OHI and then the more specific requirements for dyslexia which impacts reading.
 - **Speech and Language Impaired** - There are four different components.
 - **Traumatic Brain Injury** - An injury that results from an external physical force
 - **Visual Impairment** - This impairment affects a student's educational performance, and the term includes both partial sight and blindness.

Board Member Martinez asked for the percentage of Special Education students; the response was 12%.

Line 753200-Professional Education Services - The budget is \$374, 632, and it is down this year though *Ms. Moser* said it fluctuates over the years, and it includes all programming for students with behavioral issues. Whether they are out placed or in District, The Institute of Professional Practice is where students are typically out placed, and the agencies who provide the services are CES (Cooperative Educational Services), Creative Solutions, and IPPI (Institute for Professional Practice). *Ms. Moser* added that this line item also includes any Special Education student who attends a Magnet School. In 2015, there were 19 students and, next year, she is budgeting for 16 due to graduations and some students returning to the District.

Line 755610-Tuition Public - The budget is \$632,202 which is an increase of \$115,335. This line item is for students attending programs outside of the District, but they are still considered Public School. The programs include the therapeutic day programs at ACES, CES, and REACH. By law, the District is required to work with students 18-21 years,

and this includes Transition Programs such as RISE and Western Connection Program. Next year, there will be 18 students compared to the 16 students and 2 aides this year.

Line 755630-Tuition for Private Placement - These placements are approved by the State of Connecticut for special education programs, and they are both in and out of State. This line item includes any mediations the District goes through. The placements include:

- Ben Haven
- Boys and Girls Village
- Crotched Mountain
- Perkins Schools for the Blind
- Woodhouse Academy
- Grove School
- St. Vincent's School
- Foundation School
- Connecticut Center for Child Development
- Elizabeth Ives School

Ms. Moser said that some are residential placements which mean that a student not only attends school there but lives there as well. The increase for next year is \$402,651 as there are four additional students. She continued that when she starts planning in October, the annual meetings for students have not occurred so she works with actual numbers. "These are all actual numbers and these are all actual kids." *Superintendent Agostine* said that in the current budget, we are going to experience a significant overage between September and June that we have to account for, because we did not anticipate these numbers last year." He continued there is the potential of freezing the budget at the beginning of the New Year.

Ms. Moser continued that when she was planning last year, she had 378 Special Needs students as of October 1. By June 2016, 30 students graduated, 34 were withdrawn or dismissed, 53 students were referred, transferred in and were eligible for services. She added that at the end of June, there were 367 students but, over the summer and through October, 6 students were withdrawn, 2 students have been referred, and have been found eligible, and 17 students have transferred in with IEP's from other districts. Four of those students came in with out-placements. As of today, the total number of students receiving Special Education services is 396 which is significantly higher than the number at this time last year.

Ms. Moser said the District should receive approximately \$237,000 in Excess Costs but there is no guarantee of how much they will receive. *Board Member Stevens* said that the slides are not just math, they are actual students. *Board Member Martinez* said he appreciated the work that went into the presentation and asked if *Ms. Moser* could give an example of one of the District's strategies to keep a Special Education student in District. She said that she and *Ms. Fensore* have met with the school teams, and they try to resolve

problems proactively. She added that they provide in-service training for staff. The needs of students change from year to year and that a behaviorist in District might be beneficial.

Board Member Vaglivelo also thanked *Ms. Moser* for the presentation. He asked how many of the out placed students are the result of mediation; *Ms. Moser* said there are currently three mediations. Burden of Proof has been discussed for many years at the legislative level and *Superintendent Agostine* said that CAPS may be of the opinion that it is time for the legislature to discuss and perhaps make some changes regarding the burden of proof. Connecticut is one of the few states where the burden of proof for any Special Education dispute falls on the District, so there more cases going to mediation and arbitration ultimately. The idea is to put the Burden of Proof on the petitioner for the placement as there may be some liability for costs to the parents. *Superintendent Agostine* continued that this was a topic at the legislative breakfast that was held on Friday. *Assistant Superintendent Battista* added that Superintendents in Southern Fairfield County are going to speak to the legislators about introducing a bill.

Board Member Martinez asked *Ms. Moser* if she thought the District had a high number of paraprofessionals and how they are utilized. *Ms. Moser* responded that the building principals' maximize the paraprofessionals' schedules and that *Ms. Fensore* trains paraprofessionals on strategies on every Professional Development Day. *Ms. Fensore* added that the paraprofessionals are essential in keeping students in the District as they can provide services and support to the students. All the Special Education paraprofessionals work with students.

Proposed Facility and Resources - *Dr. Zmary* said that the total increase in this area is 2.13% or \$156,080.

Line 754312 Equipment Repair and Maintenance - The major driver is the replacement of laptops at Masuk. There will be one purchase to replace all of them to ensure consistency with the docking stations. *Dr. Zmary* continued that there will be some replacement SmartBoards as the oldest are approximately six years old.

Line 755100 Transportation - *Ms. DiBlasi* said that the District is paying approximately \$332 a day per bus while the average cost in Fairfield County is \$400. The increase is slightly under 7%, and the new daily rate per bus will be \$357 next year. She added that over the contract term of five years, it will increase to approximately \$400 per bus on a daily basis. *Superintendent Agostine* said that All-Star provides superior service, and the busses are never older than five years old; *Ms. DiBlasi* added that the District just received new busses.

Line 75530 Telephone and Communications - *Dr. Zmary* said that this is another unfunded mandate. The Connecticut Education Network provides internet connectivity for all schools throughout the state and, though it has been historically at no charge, CEN is now charging \$16,000 for the service. For next year, they put in a \$12,000 increase to cover most of it, and will reduce \$4,000 from another service to keep CEN. *Board Member Stevens* asked if they have considered using Charter or Frontier. *Dr. Zmary*

said that the District is currently a Charter customer as they provide the fiber from the schools to the CEN connection.

Line 755502 Copier, staples and paper savings - *Dr. Zamary* noted there have been significant savings in this area due to staff's ability to delete printing jobs. Staff need their badges to use the copiers and can delete a print job in the event of errors. The savings is \$19,000 with net savings to the Board of Education of \$12,000.

Lines 756210, 756220 and 756240-Natural Gas, Electricity and Heat Energy - *Ms. DiBlasi* said that they all go toward the Honeywell Project, and there is a very small increase. She said that natural gas will be used primarily at Masuk, and only Stepney will use oil. She continued that they haven't used as much natural gas as per their agreement with Honeywell. *Superintendent Agostine* said that when the District began the Honeywell Project, Eversource provided the pipe work for Masuk to have natural gas, and the District had made a commitment to use natural gas. *Ms. DiBlasi* continued that electricity is down slightly as the District locked into electricity rates going through December 2020. The District belongs to a Consortium so the buying power reduces the costs. *Superintendent Agostine* said that the total amount budgeted for utilities for 2017-2018 is lower than the costs in 2011-12 which is attributable to the Honeywell Project.

Line 757310-Photocopy Equipment - *Dr. Zamary* said that we are in the third year of the five-year contract, and the District is on track to save \$640,000 over the length of the contract. He added that feedback from staff has been very positive.

Line 758310-Bond Principle - *Ms. DiBlasi* said this is where the lease payment for Honeywell is. The decrease is because the District has five months remaining on a \$400,000 PURA loan to Eversource.

Capital Plan - *Dr. Zamary* said the major project for next year is the Stepney roof replacement and a presentation has been made to Town Council. The current discussion is to put the Stepney roof, the Fawn Hollow front driveway loop, and the Fawn Hollow PA/Clock system replacement into a bond with the Town.

There are two pieces of equipment to be replaced. Both are currently in the Operations budget. *Dr. Zamary* also noted that they do not have records of warranties on the Jockey Hollow roof, and the older sections of the Masuk roof. All others have warranties. The next underground tank replacement will be Monroe Elementary in 2019 and Masuk in 2020. Both tanks will have 30 year warranties.

Board Member Stevens asked how many IT staff members are in his office. *Dr. Zamary* said there are seven, and they service both the Board of Education and Town offices.

Superintendent Agostine said that he will continue to look for savings though he did not anticipate any further sizable decreases to significantly alter the projected 3.47%.

Board Member Stevens said he received an email that asked what the increase would mean per household. *Superintendent Agostine* said that he would have that figure at the next Board of Education meeting. *Chairman Lane* noted that the total cost would depend on the Town's budget which has not formulated as yet. *Superintendent Agostine* said that he and *Ms. DiBlasi* met with *Mike Manjos*, the Board of Finance Chairman, to discuss the budget and answer questions.

Board Member Stevens asked *Superintendent Agostine* if he knew if there was an average increase other towns were considering. *Superintendent Agostine* said that because the District is so far ahead of other towns, they may not have that information until February. *Chairman Lane* said that one of the topics discussed at the meeting on Friday was to expect significant reductions in State contributions to both educational and municipal sides though there will be no reduction in the unfunded mandates.

Board Member Stevens reiterated that the budget is very thorough and that he appreciated the work involved. There will be a general discussion on the budget at the Board meeting on December 19.

Board Member Stevens asked for a review of the Budget Process. *Chairman Lane* said the Board will adopt their budget at the first meeting in January and then it goes to the First Selectman. The First Selectman can reduce, increase, or maintain the Board of Education budget. After the First Selectman's presentation to Town Council, the Town Council will review the municipal side only. The budget is then given to the Board of Finance. There will be budget workshops and joint meetings. The Board of Finance must publish the budget at least ten days prior to the vote which will take place on the first Tuesday in April.

Motion to Adjourn at 7:50 p.m.

Motion: (J. Stevens)

Second: (S. Reilly-Monaco)

Discussion: None

**Motion passed 7 (Lane, Reilly-Monaco, Martinez, Reinoso, Stevens, and Vaglivo)-
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16-080

Respectfully submitted,



Shannon Reilly-Monaco
Board of Education Secretary