

Special Meeting Minutes Fairfield BoE, January 22, 2019

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Call to order of the Special Meeting of the Board of Education and Roll Call

Chairman Christine Vitale called the Special meeting to order at 7:30PM. Present were members Trisha Pytko, Jennifer Leeper, Philip Dwyer, Jessica Gerber, Christine Vitale, Jennifer Jacobsen, Jennifer Maxon-Kennelly, Nick Aysseh and Jeff Peterson. Others present were Superintendent Dr. Toni Jones, members of the central office leadership team, and approximately 20 members of the public.

Throughout the meeting, Board members reference budget page numbers and question numbers from the budget response document.

Mrs. Vitale announced that Dr. Jones has taken a new opportunity to lead the Greenwich school system effective July 1, 2019. Mrs. Vitale wished Dr. Jones well in her new endeavor and is looking forward to continue to work together in the upcoming months. The Board will conduct a superintendent search which will impact the budget; staff recommended using \$80K from the HVAC consultant line for this purpose. The Board is also reviewing the possibility of hiring an interim superintendent.

Mrs. Vitale said the BoS did not approve the Stratfield roof replacement as a capital non-recurring item, due it being less than \$100K. The recommendation was to place it in this budget.

Math Academy - Update

Mr. Wakeman and Mr. Cummings gave a brief presentation on the FPS Accelerated Math Program. The purpose of the program is to provide elementary students with an alternative path to double acceleration (grade 7 pre-algebra) in grade 6. The proposal for next year is to establish one grade 4 self-contained class-section and add a 5th grade in 2020-2021. After 5th grade, students would return to their feeder pattern schools.

Mr. Wakeman and Mr. Cummings responded to Board questions:

- A small group of students will qualify, approximately 5%. The class would be capped at 25 and would allow for differentiation. Based on previous year data, approximately 40-60 students would qualify, with an almost equal representation of females and males. Students with disabilities are not excluded from this program.
- Accepted students will not be required to take the summer school course to enter 7th grade pre-algebra.
- It is presumed that students will be pulled from all 11 elementary schools. Transportation was calculated at \$50K which is not in the budget, so parents will be required to provide transportation.
- Currently, Gifted students receive services with pull-out time a few hours a week. The Math Academy is a self-contained classroom that will incorporate mathematics into other areas of learning. The priority would be instruction of mathematics.
- Surrounding districts are also reviewing options to challenge students. The FPS option does not require additional FTE.
- The program will not displace other students and does not qualify as a “unique school.”
- The actual budget for this program is \$9K and is an adequate amount. PD amounts as listed in Q 1 are already in place and aren't additional costs. There will be an additional cost in the second year, when a 5th grade class is added.

Mr. Dwyer expressed his support for the program and wanted to increase opportunities in math education; this fits in to allowing students to excel.

Ms. Leeper thanked Mr. Wakeman for his presentation.

Discussion of the Superintendent's Recommended 2019-2020 Budget Request

Review Section: Revenue

Mr. Aysseh suggested making every attempt to keep large building rental clients. Page 11, Q 54, What can be done to increase building rentals? *Mr. Cullen* said that 2 large church groups found other locations; he will provide the custodial fees for large events. There is usually a wait list for building rentals.

Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly suggested the Finance Committee review PK fees, especially now with the 5-day program. Did WFC advertise for out of district students? *Mr. Mancusi* said there are no candidates for WFC at this time, but the district is now considering the same offer to out of district students for the CPP program. *Dr. Jones* added that the Board may have to review policy to make this happen.

Ms. Pytko suggested the Finance Committee look into using summer school as a revenue source; parents are always looking for summer programming. *Mrs. Jacobsen* agreed. Offering 'get ahead' classes could also be a revenue generator.

Mr. Peterson asked about the Medicaid reimbursement, why is the projection so conservative? *Mr. Mancusi* said there was no historical data to base projections on, and this being the first year, collected \$49K. Parents are informed of the program through email blasts and a Q/A document at every PPT. The district is required to send consent information on a yearly basis to parents. The district can bill for special education transportation and nursing services, but is looking to seek reimbursement for out of district transportation, speech therapy and all types of evaluations.

Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly asked about reimbursement from private insurers. *Mr. Mancusi* said that is not an option at this time. *Mrs. Vitale* said that many parents already find it difficult to get services outside of school and would be hesitant to provide insurance information for in-school services.

Mr. Aysseh began a Board discussion on Q 56 – Open Choice Students. He suggested reducing the number of Open Choice available seats next year by 6 – which is the number expected to graduate this year. He fully supports the program based on social justice, but wanted to complete the Board goal, which includes having no portables, before replacing graduating students. The dynamics of the school system may change once the BoS and BoF determine the size of the Mill Hill project. *Ms. Pytko* agreed. *Mr. Aysseh* felt it was very clear that the Open Choice program was not changing the Racial Imbalance.

Mr. Dwyer disagreed with reducing the number of Open Choice seats at this time. The Board should not make a decision about this without noticing the public. The Board's only vote on the number of seats was for the Racial Imbalance Plan; the number of additional seats is usually assigned by the Superintendent in late spring, when enrollment projections are made for the upcoming year. The Board can further discuss this issue in April, prior to making the commitment to CES. *Mrs. Jacobsen* added that any change to the number of seats in the Plan would require re-submitting the Plan to the state. *Mr. Aysseh* commented that the district is currently not adhering to the Plan, as the Plan has 100 seats and the district only allows 85. *Mrs. Vitale* said the Plan is being followed, based on the number of seats the district can accommodate. Students will be placed strategically to not increase FTE and SPED services will be billed. Board discussion continued on whether the revenue generated by the Open Choice Program covered expenses. *Dr. Jones* said Open Choice revenue can be a complex issue and should be viewed through a different lens.

Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly Q 83: Why doesn't Food Services factor into the budget? *Mrs. Munsell* said Food Services operates as its own fund with a guaranteed profit; it does not positively or negatively impact the district budget.

Mrs. Jacobsen Q 81: Please expand on ECS funding. *Dr. Jones* said ECS funds go directly to the Town. If ECS funding does not come through as planned, some localities that will take money directly from the education budget, but Fairfield does not. On the other hand, if ECS funding is higher than expected, the Town benefits.

Review Section: Staff Salaries

Mrs. Munsell reviewed the staff replacement chart that was previously reviewed with the Finance Committee. The chart illustrated a projected salary shortfall of \$1.2M. The historical staff replacement chart illustrated variances over time and how the projections have worked in the past, but did not work so well this year. The non-certified attrition rate is unusually higher this year due to custodians and secretaries; para turnover is fairly constant. *Mr. Dwyer* noted that retaining staff is good news for the district.

Review Section: Elementary Staff Movement

Mr. Dwyer, page 167: Next year, does the district have 800 more seats than are needed? *Dr. Jones* said yes, assuming every class was maxed out.

Mrs. Vitale: Are we budgeting for additional teachers in the event section numbers increase; a few extra students may impact FTE. *Dr. Jones* said there are no contingencies built in to the budget; *Mrs. Munsell* said contingencies have been built in to previous budgets. The Kindergarten cohort is based on projections and the numbers are finalized after secretaries return and confirm student enrollment. Teachers can be moved if needed, even if not the optimal solution.

Review Section: Retirement

Dr. Jones said staff will usually declare intention to retire towards the end of the school year. The probability model created by *Dr. Rasmussen* will be shared.

Review Section: Operations and Maintenance of Buildings

The Proposed Maintenance Projects Sheet was used during this discussion.

Mr. Peterson:

- Why is the FWMS elevator not a higher priority, since it impacts ADA compliance? *Mr. Cullen* said there are two elevators at FWMS and both had been operational until recently. The 2nd elevator that just went down is beyond repair and must be replaced. *Mr. Aysseh* suggested applying for the federal CDBG Community Development Block Grant for this repair.
- Item #19 – Will it really cost \$22K? *Mr. Cullen* said yes, umpires monitoring those events report that it does not comply and that coaches are being notified.

Ms. Pytko

- Why is #101, RLMS Fire Alarm replacement, so far down? *Mr. Cullen* said the system is operational, even though it needs replacing. This would be a capital non-recurring project.
- Is Item #40 due to water? *Mr. Cullen* said courtyards are difficult to maintain due to insects (worms and bees), large trees and water leakage. Gravel is preferable.

Ms. Leeper

- Which FLHS parking lot is #7? Mr. Cullen said it is the parking lot just off the entrance from Unquowa and is different from the current student lot.
- Item #54 – painting for Riverfield, isn't this newly done? Mr. Cullen said no, not every classroom was painted.
- Items #52 and #53, door replacements, no safety concerns? Mr. Cullen said no.

Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly

- Asked that redundancies from the proposed maintenance project list be removed before being sent to other Town bodies.
- Does #109 reference a repair to a new window? Mr. Cullen said he will check, but didn't think so.
- Q48, why the increase in TMS water? Mr. Cullen said there is an increase of water usage at 14 schools. One of the issues with the TMS field is there is no place to get water, so a hose has been provided and could be the reason for the increase.

Mrs. Jacobsen

- Are both high schools requesting a new softball field? Mr. Cullen said the grounds contractor suggested using clay as is done for other town fields.
- Please explain FWMS café joint expansion, #57. Mr. Cullen said it is an expansion joint for 2 different floors, where a crack is beginning to appear.
- Item #62 – card access project? Mr. Cullen said typically all outer doors remain locked except for the main entrance, accessible by key card. Dr. Jones said the district would not want every outer door operated by key card, as this would reduce security. Mr. Cullen said this project has not moved that far ahead and could probably be a Priority 3.
- Item #70 – the emergency generator. Mr. Cullen said the generator is 12 years old and needs a lot of maintenance. FLHS is an emergency shelter location. *Mr. Dwyer* suggested that the CDBG grant might be a funding source.

The Board discussed the Walter Fitzgerald Campus site at St. Emery's, which currently does not include tuition students. Mr. Cullen recommended taking \$85K from the WFC project to cover the Stratfield roof replacement (which was moved from capital non-recurring to the operating budget). This would still leave enough money for the WFC project to cover upgrading electrical, bathrooms, paint and air conditioning. The owner is responsible for the crumbling sewer lines underneath the building; these should be addressed as a health and safety concern. *Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly* and *Mr. Peterson* were uncomfortable taking money away from the WFC project.

Mr. Aysseh suggested waiting a year to replace the Stratfield roof, which may end up costing over \$100K, allowing it to be bonded; the start date may even be the same. Mr. Cullen said the roof warranty expired in 2013 and there have been recent issues. If bonded, a building committee will be needed to obtain reimbursement.

Review Section: Transportation

Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly, Q59 – what will be the feeder pattern for ECC? Dr. Jones said ECC will have a mixed feeder pattern.

Mrs. Jacobsen, Q31 – can you expand on the reason for the increase in sped transportation? Dr. Jones said there is an expectation to transport a few more students due to federal law and extended year services.

Discussion of Changes to the Superintendent's Recommended 2019-2020 Budget Request

Mrs. Vitale requested the Board provide intended changes as soon as possible so that staff will have sufficient time to provide dollar amounts.

Mr. Peterson is considering the removal of the \$45K boom and the Math Academy.

Mr. Aysseh will request a reduction of \$18K in Open Choice revenue.

Mrs. Jacobsen is considering reducing program assessment and Chromebook cases.

Mrs. Vitale said the cost of the superintendent search will be approximately \$100K and the Board will need to decide where that amount will come from. *Mr. Dwyer* said the previous superintendent search occurred after the budget was complete. The savings from the interim superintendent covered the search. *Mr. Dwyer* asked for a summary of the previous superintendent search consulting fees and details of the amount taken from the superintendent line.

Mrs. Jacobsen said it is important to have a good number for the district air conditioning project; schematic drawings are needed to get this done. *Mrs. Vitale* agreed. *Mr. Cullen* recommended that the project be bid for 10 schools; after conferring with the town, it is estimated that \$100K will provide a full-scope project estimate.

Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly preferred to hold the \$100K, in the hopes of finding savings in the superintendent line. *Mr. Aysseh* and *Mrs. Gerber* said if the superintendent search starts before the end of the fiscal year, much of the cost will have to come out of the current 18-19 budget. *Mr. Dwyer* cautioned the Board about openly discussing items that could be deemed part of negotiations, such as relocation costs. *Dr. Jones* mentioned that superintendent contracts are not confidential and can be easily accessed.

Mr. Aysseh motioned, *Mr. Peterson* seconded to extend the meeting past 11:00PM.

At *Mr. Dwyer's* request, the Board unanimously consented to change the motion to extend the meeting to 11:45PM.

Motion Passed: 6-3

Favor: *Mrs. Gerber*, *Mrs. Vitale*, *Mr. Aysseh*, *Mrs. Jacobsen*, *Mr. Peterson*, *Mr. Dwyer*

Against: *Ms. Pytko*, *Ms. Leeper*, *Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly*

Ms. Leeper said she is not in favor of reducing the budget by \$100K.

Mrs. Vitale said she will request staff recommendations if the superintendent search ends up impacting the current budget. It was also her understanding that the Board would like the Stratfield roof project to be submitted as a capital non-recurring project next year.

Mrs. Gerber said she does not plan on making any amendments and asked board members to send forth any amendments to staff well ahead of time.

Mr. Aysseh motioned, *Ms. Leeper* seconded to adjourn.

Motion Passed: 9-0

Meeting adjourned 11:02PM

Respectfully Submitted

Jessica Gerber

Fairfield Board of Education, Secretary