

**Special Meeting Minutes
Fairfield BoE, January 19, 2016**

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

Chairman Philip Dwyer called the Special meeting to order at 7:34 PM. Present were members Eileen Liu-McCormack (arrived 7:47), Marc Patten, Donna Karnal, Jessica Gerber, Philip Dwyer, Anthony Calabrese, Trisha Pytko, Jennifer Maxon-Kennelly and John Llewellyn. Others present were Superintendent Dr. David Title, members of the central office leadership team, and approximately 20 members of the public.

Business Items

Mr. Dwyer reviewed the budget meeting protocol and said common questions would be reviewed first. Dr. Title said common questions thus far revolved around health insurance, excess cost and utilities.

Medical Retention, page 159

Mrs. Munsell reviewed page 159 – the medical retention fund. The numbers are updated through November 2015. The projected IBNR is \$1.9 million; \$500K is reserved for volatility. Column 7 shows the budget differences in insurance plans; CT Partnership vs. Current Plan. Budget to budget, the state plan reduces the 2016-2017 budget by nearly \$1.5 million.

Mr. Patten asked about the \$500K in reserve and the \$276K cash balance. Dr. Title said it is already included in the budget number and AON has said this is a fair ‘cushion’ amount. The \$500K may not be needed.

Mr. Llewellyn asked, would the cash go back to the district? Can we run the \$276K to 0 and not have to transfer funds?

Dr. Title explained that the state sends us a bill for the number of people we have and we pay it; we would not have to move money into the medical retention, but that is the intent; we use the recommended rates but don’t yet know the actual. There will be no need for AON after moving to the CT Partnership; going to this plan also moves us farther from the Cadillac tax.

Mr. Llewellyn asked about the \$700K rebate in column 7. Mrs. Munsell said the rebates go away with the new plan and we won’t get that revenue.

Excess Cost, page 24

Dr. Title said he budgeted the same amount at 75%; expenditures for tuition are going down. Ms. Leonardi said tuition changes are due to students leaving or graduating; the number can fluctuate widely, as it is based on individual student status in the December filing. Dr. Title added that large shifts can be seen in the budget due to the mental health initiative; the Special Education out-of-district account, page 41, is going down but the Pupil Personnel Services, page 37, is going up. Ms. Leonardi added that while the high school outplacements are stabilizing, movement is still occurring in the elementary and middle schools; there is a slight increase in the OT/PT costs and the hourly rate.

Mr. Dwyer asked, what is the increased cost for consulting at the high schools? Ms. Leonardi said slightly less than \$650K. Dr. Title added that the tuition breakdown is found on page 90.

Ms. Karnal asked, have we started tracking how many students do not need to be outplaced? Do we have enough services for the population that needs it? Ms. Leonardi said she is still working on these figures. One of the benefits is being able to intervene early and also to bring students back to the district from the outplacement. It is possible to now service 45 students; it is also possible to adjust the contract if more is needed. Right now, the data is positive.

Utilities, page 46

Dr. Title said that while rates have gone down, added square footage and equipment have been added factors. Mr. Cullen said FWMS, FLHS and Riverfield all have added square footage and an additional HVC unit has been added to the OHS gym. Mechanical means for fresh air is at Riverfield and will be proposed for Holland Hill.

Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly asked if utility services were going down \$59K due to more efficient machines and the use of solar, despite the increase in square footage and Dr. Title said yes.

Elementary Teachers and Enrollment, pages 128 - 131

Dr. Title said the budgeting for elementary classroom teachers was done a bit differently. In the past, we budgeted exactly to the number of students. This presented last minute challenges when classes were 1 student away from a class split or collapse. This year, we budgeted the net of those possibilities.

Mrs. Liu-McCormack asked if the district was hiring based on these numbers. Dr. Title said no, this is for budgeting purposes only; class size guidelines will be applied and hiring will happen accordingly.

Ms. Karnal asked if the GE move was taken into consideration. Dr. Title said there is no way to know how that will affect us, at this point.

Mr. Dwyer said the meeting would proceed at this point as a round-robin style with each Board member asking questions for 10 minutes at a time.

Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly

Page 15 – Is there a financial impact for Cultural Competency? Will it impact the Social Studies curriculum and does it come with a reporting aspect? Ms. Leonardi said there is a financial impact; time with teachers is needed to map the PK-12 framework and challenge the status-quo, such as addressing the issues of immigrants and refugees. Currently, only a plan is needed, but legislation comes in a layered approach. Next year there might be additional requirements.

Page 24 – Open Choice, how does this benefit other students? Why is it 2.0 FTE? Dr. Title said Open Choice funds were previously undesignated and are now applied to a portion of the MST's. The 2.0 is the total; schools will show fractions of this. Mr. Llewellyn asked if the grant is reduced, does our number of Open Choice seats drop? Dr. Title said it varies on the state's situation; the program sometimes includes a bonus. The actual amount of \$3K per student hasn't changed much; we have roughly 60 or so students. Mrs. Liu-McCormack said we get \$3K as a rebate for each student, but each student actually costs the district \$18K? Dr. Title refuted that concept by explaining average vs. marginal costs; students are only placed strategically in the early grades, and are never added when a new section would be created.

Page 33 – What is the number of degree changes? What about administrative degrees? Ms. Leffert said the budget includes salary increases for degree changes; there are many this year. Degree changes are wide-ranging and include doctoral, masters and dual-certification; it is a highly variable number.

Mrs. Gerber

Health Insurance: Is this the first time that school districts can take advantage of the new health insurance and are any other districts looking into this? Dr. Title said yes to both; we were able to do this much faster than most districts.

Page 9 – Where are we with the TIPS reporting system, how much time was spent responding? Ms. Leonardi said that the discrete reporting system has been helpful and positive. In terms of workload, there has not been an explosion of reports.

Page 38/39 – Professional Technical Services – is it possible to get an updated breakdown of legal fees? Dr. Title said yes.

Maintenance Projects – Can we get a list of the maintenance projects? Dr. Title said yes, he will provide at least the top 20 maintenance projects. Mr. Patten said he noticed a \$500K increase. Dr. Title said yes, major maintenance projects are going up – this is also where painting and plowing are seen. Mr. Cullen said there are over 30 maintenance accounts.

Page 11 – Does the last sentence on the Bullying Mandate reference TIPS? Mrs. Parks said yes.

Page 12 – How will the surveys listed in the teacher and administrator evaluation mandate be done without additional funds? Dr. Title said we are continuing with an in-house survey and can now get comparative data by staying the course. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly asked if that response was actually referencing the school climate survey? Dr. Title said yes, he was actually referencing the school climate survey, but the teacher and student surveys are also home-grown.

Ms. Pytko

Thanked Dr. Title for the informative Brown Bag Budget session.

Page 126 – How is ECC enrollment projected? Is it possible to outgrow the space? Is there a state law designating how many peers can attend? Ms. Leonardi said enrollment is based on the October 1 five- year average of rolling admissions. If space became an issue, it would be possible to reduce the number of tuition students. There is no legislation that sets the percentage of peers, the target for best practice is to stay at or under 50%. Dr. Title added that the space can also be reconfigured if needed.

Mr. Patten

Page 34- Are we still self-insured? Will the state cover the large claims? What about the Tax in 2020? Dr. Title said we will no longer be self-insured, there will be no IBNR or stop-loss. Claims get merged with other claims; the state doesn't carry a stop-loss as it is such a large pool. We will not be treated any differently than anyone else for the tax in 2020. Mr. Dwyer asked for an explanation of 'substantially equivalent' and the rationale for getting an agreement from all bargaining units. Dr. Title said, while the Board has unilateral authority to implement coverage that is deemed substantially equivalent, that is a debatable point. All the bargaining units agreed on this plan, avoiding grievance arbitration, and it saves the district \$3.5 million.

Page 11-15, Mandates - Is there a way attach a cost to each mandate? Dr. Title said this might be difficult – much of the cost is in the time spent; a classic example is teacher/administrator evaluation. The amount of hours spent to conduct observations far outweighs the direct costs.

Page 22, Income, Grants – Was there a tech grant this year as in previous years? Dr. Title said we did apply for a grant and have been approved, but the state bond commission has not released the money, and it is unclear when that will happen. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly asked which program is not being implemented because of this? Ms. Byrnes said this is a grant that supplements a grant; it would aid in the replacement of netbooks.

Page 39, Extra-Curricular Activities – What are these? Dr. Title said these are faculty-driven clubs and activities and the proposal is still under consideration – it is a \$15K item. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said she was happy about this item. Mrs. Bonina said that each school has separate wants; TMS has a big demand for homework club activities; there is also a large cross country group and interest for a chess club.

Ms. Karnal

Page 10 – How many students are taking the AP tests and getting the credits? Could we get a breakdown of this graph? Dr. Title said the breakdown of the graph has been previously provided and is a baseline in the District Improvement Plan. By expanding AP, students who may not normally take an AP are encouraged to reach hard and when those students earn a 3, they become success stories. Credits earned varies by college.

How is the AP test score weighted on the transcript? Is there a need for more AP teachers? Dr. Title said the AP test score has nothing to do with GPA; the benefit is that it is a harder class. There is additional staff in the budget, some with higher level classes; staff is moved around based on student need. Mrs. Liu-McCormack said that most schools require a score of 4 or even 5 to receive credit and it would be comforting to see those absolute numbers reflected in this graph. Have we been able to sustain or increase the numbers of 4s and 5s as well as adding more 3s to the bucket? Have we been making it happen for all the kdis? Mrs. Gerber said that the AP District Honor Roll is based on a 3+; that is the reason this graph is in the book. Absolute numbers have previously been provided to the Board.

Mrs. Liu-McCormack

Page 41, Item 317– Why is there an increase in transportation with the reduced population and fuel rate decrease? What is the savings from the \$.56 decrease per gallon? Dr. Title referred to page 31; the net effect of the student population movement results in the same number of busses needed and the contract has an automatic increase of 2.5% per year. The district saved about \$100K with the decrease of the fuel rate. Ms. Leonardi added that bus aides and transportation for homeless students factor in as well.

Have you considered retaining a transportation consultant? Dr. Title said this has been done previously and it was determined that we are running the correct number of busses. Mr. Ficke does an outstanding job. The district audit suggested a bus route software upgrade and this will be done.

Will the software allow families to opt-out? Although we feel the need to provide the service, many parents drive their children. Mr. Dwyer said transportation is a state requirement, Mrs. Liu-McCormack felt there was leeway in that requirement.

How do Special Education mandates impact the budget, what is the trend, what is the total of percentage of Special Education, ELL and Gifted spending in our budget? We've never seen how the trend has evolved. What's the total percentage of SPED spending in our budget? Mr. Dwyer referenced page 123. Mr. Calabrese said 12% is for Special Education. Mrs. Liu-McCormack said she would prefer to see the trend of state mandates.

Page 37 – Would like to see growth in Instructional Services and is also interested in reallocating money to professional development. Dr. Title said that Professional Development is a healthy number and comes directly from curriculum leaders and directors. Curriculum development is also a form of staff development, as teachers perform research in this area. Mrs. Liu-McCormack said this page is the heart of what public schools are all about. She would like to see other lines have money cut from them to add to this line. It would be wonderful to have professional development from global leaders in particular disciplines.

Public Comment:

Suzanne Miska, Ryegate Road: Appreciates health plan process discussion; would like a math curriculum and special education program review.

Mr. Llewellyn

Requested adding a column for a historical breakout of the legal fees. Dr. Title said this has previously been provided.

Is there any impact to the budget from Food Service? Dr. Title said no.

Requested a copy of the Food Services Amendment for this year. Mrs. Munsell said she would furnish that.

Page 33 - Which bargaining units are currently active in discussions? Dr. Title said every non-certified bargaining unit. Mr. Dwyer added there is only one non-certified contract in current discussions; the other 4 will begin in the spring. Non-certified is about 1/3 of all employees.

Page 37 - Is iReady being discontinued? Dr. Title said the switch is being made to STAR for math at the end of the year. Mr. Llewellyn expressed concern about continuity. Dr. Boice said the same SBAC alignment can be performed for STAR as was done for IReady. The fixed price for STAR included both Math and LA, combined. Dr. Rasmussen said the iReady assessments take an hour or more; STAR assessments are done in 15 minutes; both tests provide the same amount of information and both are aligned to the Common Core. Mrs. Liu-McCormack expressed concern; she liked iReady and the detailed reports it offered – there is more opaqueness to STAR. Dr.

Rasmussen said STAR is not the only data point, there are many other data points that teachers use. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly asked if both tests provide the needed strand data and Dr. Boice said yes.

Page 45 – In approving the budget, are we implicitly approving the textbook? Dr. Title said no; the process to select the book is ongoing and the Board will vote on this once a book is chosen.

Page 45, Line 401 – What is that? Dr. Title said that is each principal's allocation is used at his/her discretion. Mrs. Munsell added that general supplies can be generic instructional supplies.

How does the budget address the consultant's review of the racial imbalance issue? Dr. Title said this is not included in the budget; the assumption is that whatever the consultant comes up with, it could not be implemented in 2016. Mr. Dwyer said the state is looking for progress.

Ms. Pytko asked about the budget process. Mr. Dwyer said that many of the Board's questions have been addressed in the Q&A document. Board members are still welcome to submit questions, and ask questions at the table.

Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly asked for a fuller explanation of PSAT grade 9 testing, page 37. Dr. Title said that the decision regarding that has not yet been made, but if adopted, the money must be in the budget. It costs \$8 per student, around \$6400.

Mr. Dwyer said next Tuesday's meeting will cover the balance of the budget book and asked Board members to discuss recommended changes at that time.

Mr. Patten asked if the Q&A document would be available for the public and was told yes.

Mrs. Gerber motioned, Ms. Karnal seconded, to adjourn the meeting.

Motion Passed: 9-0 - Meeting adjourned 10:07 PM.

Respectfully Submitted
Jessica Gerber
Fairfield Board of Education Secretary