

BUDGET WORKSHOP
EASTON BOARD OF EDUCATION SPECIAL MEETING

Thursday, February 24, 2022 – 7:30 p.m.

****IN- PERSON****

Helen Keller Middle School

On YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCRtQ6dze5a8x5XT5LzBnDHA>

MINUTES

ATTENDANCE:

Board Members: J. Stinson, J. Chieda, J. DeJesus, D. Wible, R. Hicks. J. Parker arrived at 7:48pm.

Administration: Dr. McKinnon, Dr. Pierson-Ugol, Dr. Clapp, M. Brownstein, K. Fox-Santora, J. DelConte, S Petruzzelli

Others: Members of the public: 1

CALL TO ORDER:

Jon Stinson called the Easton Board of Education Budget Workshop Meeting to order at 7:33pm.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Debbie Barer: Hayes Street, Easton: Thanked the board for their work on behalf of the children. Referenced a Fox newscast reporting a national emergency for children's mental health. Ms. Barer stated she was in favor of spending money to support student social and emotional learning.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENT:

Jenny Chieda: Thanked the administration for a good tri-board meeting earlier in the week.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION:

Superintendent, Dr. Jason McKinnon presented budget options and opportunities surrounding the health insurance increase/decrease. The board saw the impact of reducing next years' increase from the suggested 5% to 0%. At zero percent the overall projected increase moved from 4.30% down to 3.55%.

We also examined our health reserve balance which is projected to finish 2021-22 at nearly 1.6MM. Brown and Brown had recommended a 3-month average claim reserve of \$600-\$750K leaving a balance between \$750K to \$1MM. Those dollars could be used to reduce our health insurance account for 2022-23, used for capital projects or returned to the town.

The conversation then moved to the projected increase in student population along with the learning loss our children have experienced during the pandemic. SSES Asst Principal (Michael Brownstein) and Principal (Kim Fox-Santora) provided the impact of this population increase on class size as well as Art, Music and PE. From those discussions came a recommendation from the Superintendent that an additional

section in Kindergarten and First Grade be considered. These additions would also require a part time paraprofessional in kindergarten and additional hires in Art, Music and PE.

Ms. Fox-Santora shared the projected kindergarten numbers had jumped from 71 to 85 in one month providing credence to the Prowda projections of 98 Kindergarteners for the next school year. With the current 5 sections of kindergarten, the class size would be 19,19, 20, 20,20. Added to the mix, for boards' consideration, is currently there are 9 pre-k students with IEP's and 5 of those are considered complex. Therefore, the board agreed to add an additional 6th Kindergarten section ensuring that class size would be in the 16-17 range as opposed to 19-20.

A similar discussion took place in examining the current kindergarten class that will be moving into first grade next year. We know historically that our first-grade class will grow from the current kindergarten numbers. In addition, this class has 13 students with IEPs with 5 that are complex. Another consideration is this grade has 18 students in Tier 2 reading, 5 in math and 3 in SEL. These numbers are unusually high and once again speak to the impact of the pandemic on our children's academic growth.

The board found this information compelling and agreed to add an additional first grade class as well for next year. This will make the classes 15-16 students as opposed to 18-19.

The challenge is how to pay for this increase in FTEs during these tough economic times. So, the board chose to underfund the health insurance account for next year knowing that it had a large reserve to pull from. A suggestion was made to reduce the current health insurance allocation by \$400K. This reduction would be covered, if claims warranted, by the excess in health care reserves.

Subtracting \$400K from the budget request not only covered the cost of the new FTEs but drove the overall cost of next year's budget down to a 2.78% request or \$488,395 bringing the total 2022-23 budget to \$18,049,538.

Motion: move to bring forth a budget request for the 2022-23 fiscal year of \$18,049,538. (D Wible, seconded by J DeJesus) Approved 6-0

BOARD COMMENT:

Jenny Chieda: Asked why the board meeting scheduled for March 8 was canceled?

Jon Stinson: responded that March 8 is the day when the BOE will present their budget to the BOF. He also encouraged all board members to attend with the meeting beginning at 7:00pm

ADJOURNMENT:

Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education Budget Workshop Meeting be adjourned. (J. DeJesus, seconded by D. Wible) Approved 6-0

This meeting was adjourned at 9:19pm

Submitted by Jeff Parker

Secretary, Easton Board of Education