

*Filed subject to approval*

EASTON BOARD OF EDUCATION  
Meeting Minutes  
February 11, 2015

Present: Parker, Bobroske, Hicks, Horowitz, Underberger, Peskay (7:40)  
Administration: Josefsberg, Pierson Ugol, Sullivan, Kaplan, Burke, Fox Santora, Brownstein,  
Friedlander, Freeston  
Others: 12 members of the public

Chairman Parker called the meeting to order at 7:33 pm in the Library Media Center of Helen Keller Middle School.

PUBLIC COMMENT: None

BOARD COMMENT: None

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION

2015-2016 Operating Budget

Dr. Josefsberg referred to the Easton Board of Education Possible Adjustments handout, which outlines revisions and further possible reductions to the 2015-2016 operating budget.

Possible Reductions:

- Reduction in capital request of \$29,600: painting and replacement of water fountains;
- Reduce hours for SSES school secretary of \$8,068: one individual reduced by one hour per day to bring in line with other office staff;
- Reduce SSES levelled readers by \$10,000 (originally \$26,000);
- Reduce SSES Media Center books by \$3,000 (originally \$9,500);
- Remove HKMS media center furniture: \$5,000;
- Remove HKMS recess aide request: \$9,677; and
- Considering these reductions/removals, budget request went from 2.49% to 1.90%.
- Further reductions in capital request of \$35,000: removal of VCT in multiple areas, replacement of 60 cafeteria chairs, band room carpet, two large windows in media center, 12 new science tables and stools, refinish gym floor, and scrape, prime and paint the soffit (all at Keller);
- Reduce technology request \$10,000: Chrome Books;
- Reduce 0.4 FTE Art at SSES \$26,266: money reflects savings based upon seniority; and
- Remove 1.0 FTE School Counselor at Keller \$61,600: (not recommending).

Mrs. Kaplan provided details regarding Keller's technology request for 90 Chrome Books:

- 25 to replace the unreliable tablets currently on the "cart";
- 25 for the ILA cart;
- 25 available for sign-out by students and teachers separate from the carts; and
- 15 to replace old desktops which are more than 8 years old.

Original request was for 90 Chrome Books at Keller, 50 at Staples. Cut is by ½, or \$10,000, equating to 45 Chrome Books. Total technology budget is \$308,000; \$298,000 with the cut, which covers all technology costs including salary, insurance, leases, repairs, maintenance contracts, printer cartridges, replacement parts. All equipment is leased, every year leases are rolled over.

At Dr. Underberger's request, budget of \$21,000 for Dues and Fees was reviewed:

- CABA - \$6,000
- CES - \$2,300
- Tri-State - \$2,400

A discussion ensued regarding CABA membership.

Curriculum spending was reviewed; of the \$65,000 budgeted for 2014-2015, \$16,000 has been spent to-date. Mrs. Pierson Ugol explained that much of the budget is spent on curriculum writing in June, after the school year ends. Some examples: STEM, World Language, ILA revisions, Social Studies.

Dr. Underberger inquired about Teacher conferences/travel. In 2013-2014, \$20,000 of the adopted \$28,000 budget was used. The adopted 2014-2015 budget reflects \$27,000 and the proposed 2015-2016 budget is \$29,653. Mrs. Kaplan stated the cost of workshops has gone up on the average from \$175 to \$199; we have thereby increased the amount of money each teacher is allotted. Mrs. Fox Santora stated it is the classroom teachers who attend the workshops and referred to the week-long summer reading/writing workshops conducted by Columbia University which typically cost \$750. Physical Education, Art, and Technology workshops are usually a one day affair costing \$200. Mrs. Pierson Ugol added there is an institute which occurs the end of June and if money is available in the current year budget, we use it.

Chairman Parker asked how the ILA budget is tracking. The adopted budget for 2014-2015 was \$28,711 and we are now asking for an additional \$12,000. Mrs. Sullivan noted we have spent \$24,500 to-date. For science and math in 2013-2014, we spent \$130,000 and 2014-2015 was \$25,000. We are asking for an additional \$22,000 more for next year. Mrs. Sullivan noted we have spent \$20,000 to-date.

The need for Keller Media Center furniture was discussed. Mrs. Burke pointed out the existing furniture does not fit with the learning commons model. The furniture needs to be flexible and needs to accommodate varying groups of students. The functionality of the room will change.

Chairman Parker asked if it was feasible to consolidate the duties of the recess aide with the existing responsibilities of the teachers. Mrs. Kaplan pointed out there is a stipend for cafeteria supervision, but there is nothing explicit in the teachers' contract regarding a recess aide. Student lunchtime occurs during teachers' lunchtime. Although nothing additional is paid, morning and afternoon bus duty are duties teachers perform aside from their daily teaching. The question was posed if it is cost effective to hire a para in place of a teacher. Mrs. Kaplan stated there is a 17-1/2 hour para, as well as a teacher who monitors the cafeteria and that it is important to have certified teacher interaction.

A discussion ensued regarding the need for a school counselor at Helen Keller Middle School. Mrs. Bobroske spoke to adding security after Sandy Hook without any reservation and stated how important she feels a school counselor is, to address the emotional and mental health needs of the students. Dr. Josefsberg referred to literature regarding the needs of boys in middle school and stated with the present allocation, we are responding to those needs. A discussion ensued amongst board members regarding the utilization of the school counselor relative to taking out ILA, science, math, etc. teachers

Mrs. Fox Santora provided information regarding the 0.4 FTE Art reduction at Samuel Staples. Art is currently taught in one hour periods. With 30 classes for the 2015-2016 school year, one teacher could teach 20 General Art classes (four per day) and one teacher could cover the remaining 10, resulting in a .4 FTE reduction. The significant loss would be in arts integration. Staples has a program called “hot boxes”, an opportunity to co-teach with classroom teachers for 5-6 week intervals. Both teachers decide what curricular area the focus should be on – the expert of one teaching the art standards of the discipline and the classroom teacher working on the standards for the chosen area (ILA, math, etc.).

Shannon Barnett, co-president of the HKMS PTA, provided information regarding beautification, noting one member of the PTA has spent \$700 of their own money taking care of “public” areas of the school. The PTA has met with the first selectman regarding this grey area. Parks & Recreation has the equipment to cut and maintain the school grounds, but because they are responsible for the entire town, the school is at the bottom of the priority list. They lack manpower as well. The PTA has to ask to have work done. We want to be sure all the work done over the past 1-1/2 years is maintained and the town needs to be accountable. The PTA has looked into contracting the work to an outside firm, but it is far too costly and there are numerous liability issues to consider.

Dr. Underberger reviewed the possible reductions and asked Board members to indicate their preference: a 1.70% budget increase which involves the following:

- reducing the capital request (\$64,600);
- reducing hours for SSES school secretary (\$8,068)
- reducing SSES levelled readers (\$10,000)
- reducing SSES Media center books (\$3,000)
- remove request for HKMS Media center furniture (\$5,000)
- reducing Dues & Fees for the CABA membership (\$6,000);
- keeping the HKMS recess aide \$9,677;
- keeping the 0.4 FTE Art at SSES \$26,266;
- keeping the 1.0 FTE School Counselor at HKMS \$61,660;
- keeping the \$10,000 Technology request;
- and adding in \$500 for outdoor maintenance of Keller.

Or a 1.64% increase which involves removing the HKMS recess aide.

Mr. Horowitz: 1.70%

Mr. Hicks: 1.64%

Dr. Underberger: 1.64% (err on side of 1.70%)

Mrs. Peskay: 1.64%

Mrs. Bobroske: 1.70%

Mr. Parker: 1.70%

**Motion to adopt a 2015-2016 Easton Board of Education proposed budget of \$15,665,993, which represents a 1.70% increase over last year's budget. Underberger, Bobroske. Mr. Hicks opposed. Approved 5-1.**

#### PUBLIC COMMENT

Shannon Barnett: Mrs. Barnett feels art is very important, especially at the elementary level and asked that this not be cut from the budget. Mrs. Barnett has a child who loves art and feels it would be devastating to the kids. Mrs. Barnett asked Dr. Josefsberg how Easton compares to Redding, as she feels Redding has a stronger art and music program. Dr. Josefsberg stated there is more staff allocation in

Redding. Regarding the recess aide – are parent volunteers possible? Regarding the school counselor position – many children benefit from the school counselor and can speak from having a seventh grader.

Amy Traggianese, Westwood Drive: Art teacher at Staples. When cuts were made 3-4 years ago, which cut art down to once a week, many kids asked why that happened. Students were upset and teachers were fielding many questions. Eliminating hot block will erode the arts integration portion of being a hot school. Children learn in different ways. First graders and kindergarteners who cannot read or remember site words benefit because the teaching is done in a more developmentally-appropriate way. We see academic improvement with students who are able to write with finger paints, etc. As someone certified as an elementary teacher as well as an art teacher, Mrs. Traggianese asked the board to please allow them to continue learning through the arts.

Diane Ronan, Tuckahoe Road: Mrs. Ronan supports the hot blocks program; has a son who loves it.

#### BOARD MEMBER COMMENT

Dr. Underberger asked the PTA to keep the letters coming to the Board. They have made a huge difference in supporting what the Board of Education brings to the Board of Finance.

The Board of Finance meeting occurs Tuesday, March 5, 2015 at the Easton Sr. Center.

Mr. Hicks asked that the Board receive the budget presentation a few days prior to the Board of Finance meeting.

**Motion that the Easton Board of Education adjourn the meeting. Underberger, Bobroske. Approved. Unanimous. Meeting adjourned at 9:28 pm.**

Submitted by Regina Bobroske, Board of Education Secretary

Recorded by Wendy Brighindi