

Easton Board of Education
Meeting Minutes
February 13, 2017

Attendance:

Board of Education: Bindelglass (arrived at 7:57pm), Bobroske, Chieda, Hicks, Parker, Shortt

Administration: McMorran, Pierson Ugol, Lagas, Edwards, Kaplan, Brownstein, Burke

Others: Approximately 28 members of the public

Mr. Parker called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion: Move that the Easton Board of Education accept the minutes of the January 30, 2017 special board meeting as submitted. Shortt, Hicks. Approved. Unanimous.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Dan Underberger, Flat Rock Drive, stated that due to both recent and impending budget cuts, the Board should consider increasing class size to compensate for reduced funding. He noted that cuts should be made in both General Education budgets and Special Education budgets. Finally, Mr. Underberger requested that the Board refrain from further cutting programs as it is detrimental to the students and takes too long to recover from the effects of the cuts.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENT

None.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION

2017-2018 OPERATING BUDGET

Dr. McMorran reported on the 2017-2018 proposed Operating Budget. This was the third session of budget presentations to the Board. Dr. McMorran noted that Governor Malloy released a new proposed budget one week ago with significant changes in funding to the towns by the State of Connecticut. Three major changes to the existing budget were proposed as follows:

- Education Cost Sharing reduced from \$177,907 to \$14,462
- Special Education Excess Cost of 70% above 4.5 times reduced to a flat Grant of \$328,098 for K-12
- Teacher Retirement Bureau to be paid 1/3 by town instead of entirely by the State at a cost of \$1,298,824

Dr. McMorran then reported additional ways in which to reduce the budget. Option 1 would reduce the prior proposed budget by \$59,310 for a total increase over last year of 1.505%. Option 1 included the following reductions:

- Increase anticipated state reimbursement for Open Choice by \$10,000
- Cut proposed recess Paraprofessional (\$8,000)
- Reduce disposal services by \$4,000
- Delay \$8,000 in SmartBoard replacement
- Defer repaint of parking stripes at SSES (\$4,685)
- Defer repainting of HKMS soffits (\$13,125)
- Reduce postage (\$500)
- Reduce standardized testing costs (\$2,500)



- Reduce maintenance supply costs (\$1,500)
- Reduce computer supply costs (\$500)
- Reduce gas cost (\$5,000)

Option 2 would reduce the prior proposed budget by \$74,900 for a total increase over last year of 1.029%.

Option 2 included the reductions offered by Option 1 with the addition of the following reduction:

- Reduction of 1 FTE Teacher (Salary and Insurance) resulting in 5 sections of fifth grade (21, 22, 22, 22 & 22 students per class respectively) instead of 6 sections (18, 18, 18, 18, 18 & 19).

Mr. Parker asked that the Administration provide added information on the option of how much savings a reduction in 2nd grade class section would be. Mr. Parker also noted the positive impact of paraprofessionals through Tier II intervention,

Dr. Bindelglass noted that even though the general population of students has decreased, the absolute number of students needing intervention has increased. He stated that the tiered intervention program is succeeding at preventing more serious and costly needs from arising in students.

Ms. Bobroske asked if there was any empirical evidence available on the success of the three-tier intervention program. Dr. McMorran did note that they tracked the movement of students in, within, and out of the tiers. Staff will provide more information at a later date.

Ms. Shortt asked what was less expensive or more effective, increased early intervention, or smaller class size.

Ms. Bobroske noted the increased pressure on reducing the budget due to declining enrollment. She stressed the need to be able to justify budget requests with proof of positive outcomes.

Dr. Pierson Ugol added that while we can quantify progress of students who received Tier I and Tier II intervention, it is difficult to measure the effects of smaller class size. Dr. McMorran did note the results of one Tennessee Star Project that proved that in grades K-3 students benefited from smaller class size.

Ms. Bobroske pointed out that the Board values the importance of all the possible reductions that may be made. In light of the Governor's recent proposal, the Board needs to be prepared for the possibility of a "least worst" decision.

Dr. McMorran stated that because Easton does not have any programs to be cut, the only real options are to increase class size. He noted that Discrete Math is a program that could be cut at savings of around \$30,000.

Ms. Chieda noted that perhaps change could be made at the contractual level during this summer's negotiations with the teachers' associations. She then stated that the Board should reconsider "jumping" to increase class size, as it does not make an impactful impression on the overall budget needs.

2017-2018 Operating Budget: Special Education Presentation

Tracy Edwards, Director of Special Services presented the 2017-2018 proposed Special Education Budget. She stressed the requirement of meeting the laws and standards that are put forth by the Federal and State Government. Ms. Edwards then noted major points proposed in this year's budget, namely:

- Reduction of CCSN services to 1 day per week
- Reduction of 4 BASES paras total
- Legal Allowance
- Outplacement and related transportation
- Transportation increase at SSES

- Reductions to 2017 ESY staff and HKMS OT
- No change to certified staff at HKMS or SSES

Ms. Edwards presented slides and a correlating handout citing overall “buckets” of cost in the Special Services Budget. These were:

- Total cost of certified special education teachers and administrators: \$1,051,061
- Total cost of non-certified staff members: \$468,654
- Total cost of Speech and Language services: \$332,028
- Total cost of related services (including OT, PT and other supports): \$309,976
- Total cost of Student Support Services (not necessarily Special Education students): \$300,591
- Office support for students, parents and staff (2 secretaries specific to Special Services): \$116,918
- Staff Benefits: \$696,013
- Transportation: \$168,509
- Other Placements and Outplacements (including aforementioned legal allowance): \$209,217
- Reimbursements received: \$450,784
- Includes pre-school tuition (\$4,400/year for 4 days/week, \$5,500/year for 5 days/week)
- Ms. Bobroske asked that the Board be provided with information on how our pre-school costs compare with those of the private schools in town and to comparable schools in other towns.
- Substitutes: \$50,100 (averaged)
- Summer Programming (Maintenance and Generalization of Skills): \$118,473
- Equipment, materials and supplies: \$44,101
- Professional Development, Tuition Reimbursement, Stipends: \$93,266

Ms. Shortt asked if there was any possibility of staff reductions.

Dr. Bindelglass inquired whether there was any potential cost savings in sharing staff between SSES and HKMS. Ms. Edwards responded that in the majority of cases the teachers were under different contracts by each school, so this is not an area for fluid savings.

Mr. Parker asked that the Board and Administration take a closer look at reducing the proposed sections in the second grade. He also asked what the budget would look like at 0.

Ms. Chieda asked that there be investigation into further cuts from the Special Services budget.

Dr. McMorran stated that it is important to note that the Special Services budget does not include any contingency allowance for additional students entering or additional services being required. Cutting this budget any further would disallow for any emergency funds.

EXTERIOR LIGHTING AT STAPLES: HONEYWELL

Dr. Lagas reported on the 11 outdoor lights at SSES that have not been working since last May. Honeywell tested the lines and established that there is a connection between the building and the poles, meaning the light bulbs are the issue. RAB installed these bulbs and the warranty has expired. To test and potentially replace these bulbs requires a lift and a licensed electrician. Honeywell quoted the job at \$12,600; Public Works quoted the job at \$6,100. Dr. Lagas recommended that the Board employ Public Works for the job. It was noted that the damage may have been caused by lightning, in which case it is covered by the Board’s insurance; However, Mr. Hicks recommended not filing a claim as it could raise the premium again.

Motion: Move that the Easton Board of Education authorize Central Office to use Easton Public Works to repair/replace the non-working bulbs. Shortt, Bindelglass. Approved. Unanimous.

NESDEC

Mr. Parker presented on the New England School Development Council's proposal to conduct a school facilities best educational use study for long term planning purposes. NESDEC would provide the staff to conduct the study. The Board, acting through the Superintendent of Schools, would take such actions as appropriate to facilitate the study. This project could be completed within four months of the signing of an Agreement or another mutually acceptable commencement date. The total fixed cost of the study as described in the proposal handed out would be \$13,668.

Dr. Bindelglass asked if the Redding School District should be involved in the study. Ms. Chieda asked if the current numbers and information warrant a study of this type. Ms. Bobroske stated that this study would provide empirical evidence that would aid in making necessary decisions when the time comes. Mr. Parker noted that the Board alert Redding to their decision to move forward with this study. Ms. Bobroske added that Region 9 Board also be notified. There will be further long-term planning discussions around the issues of declining population and potential consolidation.

Motion: Move that the Easton Board of Education employ NESDEC to do an audit for SSES and HKMS long-range planning purposes with the understanding that the Redding and Region 9 Boards will be notified and that the timeframe not exceed the end of this school year. Parker, Shortt. Approved. Unanimous.

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS

Samuel Staples Elementary School: In addition to the report provided to the Board on paper, Mr. Brownstein recognized the wonderful 4th and 5th grade concert that took place. He also noted that last week the school partook in the "Great Kindness Challenge", and finally Mr. Brownstein mentioned that SSES had been chosen to partake in "NATE"- National Assessment of Educational Progress on February 14, 2017. Sixty-two fourth graders were chosen to participate in either a reading or math assessment. Parents were notified via mail.

Helen Keller Middle School: In addition to the report provided to the Board on paper, Mrs. Kaplan wished to acknowledge the success of the project on "Effects of Contact Sport on Student Health". Students, medical professionals and athletes took part in a Panel and Q&A on 2/3/17. It was a wonderful experience. Mrs. Kaplan also noted "French Night" when a French teacher and 9 students and families attended a Sound Tigers game where their prepared video was broadcast.

Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction: To be brief, Dr. Pierson Ugol referred the Board to her written report which includes information on curriculum, instruction, and assessment. There are also tables with details about professional development and District meetings. She specifically noted that state mandated sexual abuse and assault awareness training was underway.

Director of Special Services: To be brief, Ms. Edwards referred the Board to her written report.

Interim Director of Finance & Operations: Dr. Lagas reported that the two transfers noted in the transfer report were due to moving funds into the correct accounts. Currently we are on target to be 97% on budget.

BOARD OF EDUCATION COMMITTEE REPORTS

Insurance Committee: Mr. Hicks reported that he attended the Insurance meeting (Town of Easton meeting?). Notable takeaways from this meeting were the impact of the 3% property tax rise in the town of Easton and a reduction of 10% in workers' compensation insurance.

Mr. Parker met with the DATTCO executive team, Ed Nagy, Dr. McMorran and Adam Dunsby regarding the transportation budget. They had a good discussion and are moving towards keeping the buses in Easton behind SSES. This will happen in stages. It will happen by June 1, 2018 and will cost a couple hundred thousand dollars. Public Works will conduct most of the work. This will bring in some revenue as we will charge Redding rent for the space they will use.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Carolyn Oppenheim, Hunting Ridge Road, noted her concern with larger class size in next year's second grade. Her child's psychologist sat in in the first grade classroom and noted that the teacher was doing more "management" than teaching. She asked that the board carefully consider the number of sections in the second grade. She also pointed out that it is difficult to get back what we give up during budget reduction.

Alyssa Salazar, Freeborn Road, stated that she is a behavioral health professional and has seen an influx of children in her practice with anxiety, depression or ADHD. She noted that larger class size could be adding to the occurrences of these issues. Professionally and personally, she advocates for smaller class sizes so students get the help they need and deserve. Younger students have increased logistical and physical needs. In kindergarten there can be up to a year and a half age gap in students. The academic requirements at second grade level are such that coupled with larger class sizes, students may undergo undue added stress.

Sarah O'Brien, Glover Lane, asked how the community can help throughout the budget reduction process. Mr. Parker noted that there may be a time in the future where fundraising may be helpful. Dr. McMorran noted that fundraising cannot take the place of providing necessary services to students through the budget, stating that the public can supplement, not supplant required services.

Connie Sao, Fieldstone Drive, agrees with prior public commenters that the added section in second grade should not be cut.

Celeste D'Angeles, Virginia Drive, stated that many people in the community are concerned by increasing class sizes. Cutting one teacher position can have catastrophic ramifications and make barely a dent in the budget reductions.

Margie Schrever, High Ridge Road, asked if any community volunteer programs could aid with support cut backs. She suggested using older students to aid with reading and extra help.

Alyssa Salazar, then responded to Ms. Schrever by stating that volunteers cannot take the place of state required services.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENT

Dr. Bindelglass commented that the Effects of Contact Sports on Student Health panel was a success and that he was honored to take part in it.

Ms. Chieda thanked Ms. Edwards for her thorough work and dedication.

Ms. Shortt thanked the whole team of staff and administrators for their efforts during the budget season.

Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education adjourn the meeting. Parker, Shortt. Approved. Unanimous.

The meeting adjourned at 10:22 pm.

Submitted by
Regina Bobroske, Secretary

Recorded by Elise Cavanaugh
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