

*Filed subject to approval.*

Easton Board of Education  
Budget Workshop Minutes  
HKMS Library Media Center  
Wednesday, February 15, 2017 - 7:30 p.m.

ATTENDANCE

Board of Education: Bindelglass, Bobroske (arrived at 8:24pm), Parker, Shortt, Chieda, Hicks  
Administration: McMorran, Pierson Ugol, Fox Santora, Brownstein, Kaplan, Burke, Edwards,  
Others: Approximately 35 members of the public

Mr. Parker called the meeting to order at 7:32 p.m.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Claire Wilkes, Porter Road, presented a Parent Petition signed by over 220 parents in the Easton School District in support of smaller class sizes. Ms. Wilkes read aloud the email she had previously sent to the Board.

Gretchen Goldstein, Brianna Lane, voiced their support for the aforementioned Petition.

Deborah Wyball also supported the push for smaller class size as she moved to Easton for the level of education offered in the schools.

Connie Sao, Fieldstone Drive, also agreed that small class size is essential.

Matt Harris, Park Avenue, noted that Easton has a high mill rate, and encouraged the Board to take into account the parents' request to keep class sizes small.

Celeste D'Angeles, Virginia Drive, agreed with previous comments and noted that a 0% budget increase could have a significant negative impact on students. She also encouraged the Board to be steadfast in their budget request to the Board of Finance.

Rachael Mazeretti, noted that she moved to Easton for the schools and her two children are on opposite ends of the "bell curve". Both are thriving now in Easton public schools due to small class size. She argued that if moved to a larger class size, students on the extremes of the curve would be lost.

Alyssa Salazar, Freeborn Road, reiterated that larger classes and cutting programs could be a detriment to students. She moved here for the schools and added that the community will support the Board's efforts to keep classes small.

Jane Bass, Hillcrest Road, stated that she has a sensory integration child in Easton schools who needs small class size. She asserted that it was important to challenge students and to teach to ability and keep kids interested.

Alisha Gorder, Sport Hill Road, stated her support for the previous commenters.

Jennifer Johnson, Fawn Road, stated that small class size, world language and Discrete Math were important and must be maintained. She is worried that families may leave town if the schools deteriorate.

Laura Wheatley, Vista Drive, asked if there were any numbers on how much teacher absence was impacting the substitute budget. She noted that she believes teacher absences negatively impacts students learning.

Jenny Chieda, Wyldewood Road, wanted to state that as a parent and a Board member, she was also concerned about growing class sizes. She stated that although it may seem to make sense on paper, actual children are the ones bearing the brunt of the impact of decisions.

#### BOARD MEMBER COMMENT

Ms. Shortt noted that small class size and specialists are important. She agreed with the sentiments of the public comments.

Dr. Bindelglass applauded the efforts and activism of the community, although he noted that when the last Board vote occurred, only 20% of the population turned out. He stated that voting is an integral way for voices and opinions to be heard.

Ms. Chieda noted that while many see the schools as a draw to the town, there is a view that each household's fiscal responsibility does not meet the amount of what the schools are required to provide per student. Ms. Chieda then went on to comment that she would like the Board to aim to reach their goals without cutting teachers or programs. As an educator, she does see a significant positive outcome from smaller class size, even at the high school level. She stated that the Board should trust the staff and administration. She asked that the Board consider the social contract that needs to be upheld between the community and the schools.

Mr. Parker noted that he moved to Easton for the schools. He also asserted that due to the very recent announcements out of Hartford, the Board's task changed dramatically in the past week. He assured the community that the Board will perform its due diligence, and applauded the parents for their strong move regarding the petition.

#### DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION 2017-2018 OPERATING BUDGET

Mr. Parker began by stating that even though the Board would vote on a percentage at this meeting, there may be unforeseen changes by the time the March 8, 2017 meeting occurs.

Dr. McMorran reported on the 2017-2018 Proposed Operating Budget. He stressed that the school does not aim to simply teach to tests, but rather raise active citizens. 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 are 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 paid 1/3 by town instead of entirely by the State at a cost of \$1,298,824

Dr. McMorran then gave a brief overview of budget options previously noted in the February 13, 2017 meeting. In addition to these reductions, the Superintendent provided a handout with multiple scenarios, which would reach a range of reduction goals. He also mentioned that he was hesitant to cut into the Assistant Superintendent's Budget, as it was too important to student learning.

The Board then discussed in detail the scenarios laid out by the Administration to reach budget increase between 1.5% and 0% budget request.

Dr. Bindelglass asked how the media center was staffed. Ms. Kaplan replied that it included a Para and a librarian. Ms. Bobroske asked what the impact on students would be if the Para was eliminated, to which Ms. Kaplan replied it would negatively impact students, and make obsolete the plans they had to, at no cost, reorganize staffing to allow for outdoor recess.

Mr. Parker asked if they revisited 2-tier bussing, would there still be a savings of around \$40,000. Dr. McMorran recalled that it was closer to \$30,000 when looked at in the past but that number was at higher gas prices so would be less. Ms. Fox noted that they did projections on this in the past and it showed that the trip was potentially very close to an hour for some students. Ms. Chieda stated that that length of a commute would negatively impact students learning.

Mr. Parker then asked what the financial impact was on teachers missing school days, namely for PD. Staff will look into this further. Dr. Pierson Ugol noted that curriculum development took place during the summer. Mr. Parker asked if the Teachers' Association would consider making some allowances for PD to occur after school hours. He is considering making a request for a 2-hour wrap-around instead of 45 minutes. Dr. McMorran noted that this could be an item for contract negotiation.

Ms. Bobroske noted that it was important to present to the Board of Finance the consequences and risks of cuts further than what is initially proposed by this Board. She continued by stating that the goal is to make reductions in areas that impact students the least.

Ms. Shortt recommended that there are some items that may be cut that could be areas for potential community and parent involvement and fundraising. Ms. Bobroske recommended that these areas be identified and noted, so that they may be revisited should outside funding be required.

Ms. Burke noted that she believed that the current lead teacher of Discrete Math could hold the class effectively without the secondary instructor. Ms. Kaplan later concurred this with confidence.

The Board of Education examined and analyzed each line item that was proposed to be potentially eliminated or altered. They explored exactly what the extent of each options impact was on students.

Mr. Parker asserted that he believed it was essential to present to the Board of Finance, a "best effort" budget.

Ms. Kaplan agreed to further evaluate the Clubs and other extra-curricular areas, for potential changes or outside funding.

Mr. Bindelglass reiterated his belief that it needs to be clearly outlined for the Board of Finance that, while overall population may have declined, the population of students, in absolute numbers, requiring special services has risen. Ms. Kaplan added that the Board of Finance should also be made to understand that many of the services provided are mandated by law and cannot be reduced.

Ms. Bobroske voiced her view that it was critical that this budget did not get rejected at the vote level.

Mr. Parker then took an informal poll, judging at which percentage each member felt comfortable recommending for vote. The three levels under discussion were 1.19%, .96% or 1.1%. After discussion and estimation, there was a motion set forth to vote for a budget increase of 1.1%.

**Motion: Move that the Easton Board of Education approve a budget increase of 1.1% for the 2017-2018 school year. Parker, Bobroske. Approved. Unanimous.**

#### PUBLIC COMMENT

Christine Gallerton, North Street, thanked the Administration for their tireless efforts. She then asked why students could not go outside for a recess during ELT. She then applauded the Discrete Math Program and thanked all the teachers for their great work.

Margie Shreeve, High Ridge Road, asked if it was possible and/or helpful to raise pre-school tuition to be on par with other area schools. She noted that Easton's tuition was lower than comparable and their hours are longer.

#### BOARD COMMENT

Ms. Bobroske thanked the administration team for their extraordinary work.

#### ADJOURNMENT

**Motion: Move to adjourn the meeting of the Easton Board of Education Budget Workshop. Bobroske, Bindelglass. Approved. Unanimous.**

The meeting adjourned at 10:05pm.

Submitted by,  
Regina Bobroske, Easton Board of Education Secretary

Recorded by,  
Elise Cavanaugh