

REGION 9 BOARD OF EDUCATION

March 21, 2017

Regular Meeting Minutes

Attendance:

Board of Education: Coppinger, D'Agostino, Gombos, Hancock, Hocker, Johnston, King, Sobel
Administration: McMorran, Pierson Ugol, Lagas, Pin, Desmarais, McTague, Roszko, Santangeli
Staff: Angell, Czudak, Panos, Schemm, Staron
Others: Approximately 17 members of the public

Chairman Hancock called the meeting to order at 7:32 pm in the JBHS Learning Commons.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

Motion: move to approve the minutes of the March 6, 2017, and March 9, 2017, Region 9 Board of Education meetings as amended. Gombos, D'Agostino. Approved. 7-0-1.

Ms. Sobel abstained. Corrections: Mr. Coppinger noted the following changes to be made in the March 9th minutes under the second Board Comment section: correct "gest" to "gets" and correct "can be" to "could also be" returned to the member towns. Mr. D'Agostino also noted in the same section that "Education Cost Sharing money" should be "Excess Cost Reimbursement money." Ms. Sobel abstained because she did not attend the March 6th meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Thayer Smock, Peaceable Street, Redding: Spoke in support of keeping athletics.

Pete Graziano, Deacon Abbott Road, Redding: Spoke in support of keeping athletics and the arts programs. He said the Board should not cut anything and let the voting public decide. He also thanked the Board for all their hard work and recognized they are all volunteers.

David Monson, Newtown Turnpike, Redding: Spoke in support of keeping athletics and feels that participation fee is reasonable.

Laura Hogan, Umpawaug Road, Redding: Asked that the three Boards of Education in Easton and Redding collaborate and send a joint letter to the state government about the proposed cuts to the towns.

Helene Hawk, Cricklewood Road, Redding: Spoke in support of keeping athletics and arts programs. Urged the Board not to cut teachers and let the voters decide.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENT

Mr. Coppinger stated he had shared with the Board members and administrators a spreadsheet that he had created and hoped they found it helpful. Suggested that a committee be formed to review the way the budget is written and regroup certain items.

Mr. D'Agostino and Ms. Gombos suggested the order of the items on the agenda be changed.

Motion: move to change the order of agenda items under Discussion and Possible Action as follows: Item B, Participation Fees first; followed by item C, Fees for Use of Buildings and Grounds and then item A, 2017-2018 Budget Proposal. Gombos. D'Agostino. Approved. 6-2-0. Mr. King and Mr. Hancock opposed.

Mr. King said he was concerned about the overly critical tone at the Board meetings and felt the professional staff at Region 9 needed to be treated professionally.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION

Participation Fees: Athletics and Co-Curricular

Ms. Pin provided a document on proposed participation fees which included: 1) \$30 per student/year for unlimited activities and no family cap for student activities for after-school clubs/groups receiving financial support from the Region 9 budget and 2) for athletics - \$65 per student/season (fall, winter, spring) with a \$260 family cap/year. Boys' hockey would be exempt due to the currently required \$1,400 per athlete. Waiver opportunities would be available for those in financial need. This would generate possible revenue of \$63,000. This would defray salaries and stipends in the 1125-115 and 1126-115 accounts. Ms. Gombos stated that up until this point the Region 9 Board has never been in favor of participation fees for anything in the past, but she feels this is a solid proposal.

Motion: move to accept Head of School Gina Pin's proposal on participation fees as written with the stipulation that fees collected for athletics be applied to reduce athletics costs in the budget and fees collected for extracurriculars be applied to extracurriculars. Coppinger, Gombos. Approved. 6-2-0. Mr. Hocker and Mr. Johnston opposed.

Dr. Lagas explained the fees would go into a Special Revenue Fund with additional line items in the budget accepting receipt of the participation fees as a reduction of expenses.

Fees for Use of Buildings and Grounds

Mr. D'Agostino suggested that the Board have an initial discussion about fees for use of buildings and groups before having the Facilities & Fields look into the proposal further. After discussion, the consensus of the Board was that it would be worthwhile and appropriate for the Facilities & Fields Committee to explore this concept and bring it to the Board at a later date for further consideration.

2017-2018 Operating Budget Proposal

Dr. McMorran reviewed the declining enrollment Region 9 is facing and the challenges the team is facing in balancing the reduction yet maintaining quality. He also noted that he has been attending various meetings in Hartford and locally with state representatives to deal with recent proposals from the governor's office.

Ms. Pin reviewed an incremental reduction sheet. Budget discussion ensued. Mr. Hocker said that he would be resistant to any further cuts from the 2.28% budget proposed at the last meeting other than the additional revenue discussed for participation fees. Mr. Coppinger stated that he felt there should be more reductions in faculty and is concerned about the increase in special education costs. He would prefer a budget closer to a 1.5% to 1.6% increase if the state's excess

cost reduction shortfall is included. Mr. D'Agostino stated that no other town in the DRG is budgeting for the governor's proposal. If we were to budget for the \$316,000 shortfall, he recommended taking from the Health Insurance Reserve since traditionally the Board has added money to the Health Insurance Reserve at the end of the year with unspent funds. Ms. Gombos stated that she felt the budget should include the \$316,000 excess cost reimbursement shortfall from the state rather than risking having to go back to the voters again to cover the shortfall. She also stated that she supported Dr. Lagas' recommendation to fund the Health Insurance. Mr. Hancock said he thinks 2.28% is a good starting point; that this might not be the year to consider a Special Education Department Chair; reduce the substitute line and include the participation fees but budget it conservatively at \$60,000. He feels the excess cost reduction will go through but budget it at \$200,000. Mr. King feels the \$316,000 excess cost reduction shortfall should be included rather than risk going back to the voters. He believes this concern outweighs funding the capital budget. He supports a budget around 2.28% increase. Mrs. Sobel stated that drivers for special education vs. general education are very different and she does not want to see special education cut further. She supports funding some of the excess cost reduction. Mr. Johnston said he supports the 2.28% budget increase and let the voters decide.

Additional discussion occurred surrounding: 1) reduction in paper cost; 2) explanation of music therapy; 3) mail run stipend for delivery of mail between Barlow, the K-8 schools, town hall and Central Office; 4) the reinstatement of the student assistance counselor to half-time; and 5) cost effectiveness to have the a nurse as a contracted position vs. having the position as part of the support staff bargaining unit and any impact this position has on the non-certified employee contract.

Motion: move to approve the Region 9 Board of Education 2017-2018 operating budget at \$24,043,708, an increase of 3.28% over the current year budget. Hocker, King. Motion failed. 4-4-0. Mr. Hocker, Mr. Johnston, Mr. King, and Mr. Hancock voted in favor of the motion. Mr. Coppinger, Mr. D'Agostino, Ms. Gombos and Ms. Sobel opposed.

This motion included the revenue offset of \$60,000 for participation fees, adding in the full excess cost reduction shortfall of \$316,146 and the reduction in the substitute line of \$25,000.

Motion: move to approve the Region 9 Board of Education 2017-2018 operating budget at \$23,752,737, an increase of 1.61% over the current year budget. D'Agostino, Johnston. Motion failed. 3-5-0. Mr. Coppinger, Mr. D'Agostino and Ms. Gombos voted in favor of the motion. Mr. Hancock, Mr. Hocker, Mr. Johnston, Mr. King, and Ms. Sobel opposed.

This motion included the revenue offset of \$60,000; adding in \$200,000 for the excess cost reduction shortfall; the reduction of \$25,000 substitute line; reducing a special education teacher and a science teacher for a combined reduction of \$174,375.

During discussion of the motion, Mr. Schemm explained the impact of reducing another science teacher. Ms. Roszko confirmed that the delivery of services to students with IEPs and 504 plan would not be negatively impacted by the reduction in the Special Education position.

Motion: move to approve the Region 9 Board of Education 2017-2018 operating budget at \$23,885,635, an increase of 2.60% over the current year budget. Hocker, King. Motion failed. 4-4-0. Mr. Hancock, Mr. Hocker, Mr. Johnston and Mr. King voted in favor of the motion. Mr. Coppinger, Mr. D'Agostino, Ms. Gombos and Ms. Sobel opposed.

This motion included the revenue offset of \$60,000; adding \$158,073 for the excess cost reduction shortfall; and the reduction of \$25,000 substitute line.

Motion: move to approve the Region 9 Board of Education 2017-2018 operating budget of \$23,789,137, an increase of 2.18% over the current year's budget. Sobel. Hocker. 4-4-0. Motion passed by weighted vote. 3 Redding votes and one crossover vote from Easton in favor. Mr. Hancock, Mr. Hocker, Mr. King and Ms. Sobel voted in favor of the motion. Mr. Coppinger, Mr. D'Agostino, Ms. Gombos and Mr. Johnston opposed. (4.22-3.78-0)

This motion included the revenue offset of \$60,000; added \$158,073 for the excess cost reduction shortfall; the reduction of \$25,000 substitute line; and reduction of a special education teacher.

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS

Motion: move that Administrative Reports be moved to the April 2017 Region 9 Board of Education meeting. Gombos. D'Agostino. Approved. Unanimous.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Pete Graziano, Redding: Expressed concern about losing girls athletics and stated he is not clear on what actually was removed from the budget.

Tim DiScipio Soundview Drive, Easton: Expressed that he wanted more detail on the cut of the special education teacher.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENT

Mr. Coppinger offered to stay after the meeting if anyone wanted clarification on what is out of the budget. He stated that in the budget process no one gets everything they want and Board members do the best they can.

Mr. D'Agostino said the Board tries to do the best they can with the information they are provided and the Board cares deeply about the students.

Ms. Gombos said she did not completely understand the participation fee plan and felt that it was not well communicated. She is concerned that people will pay to participate and then have to find transportation to practice and events as transportation for some teams has been cut. Mr. Hancock thanked the administration for their work.

Mr. King noted there was good teamwork between the administration and the Board at the meeting.

Ms. Sobel said she had a different understanding than Ms. Gombos about the participation fees and that she thought it meant things would be preserved.

Mr. Johnston expressed his concern that the full state proposed excess cost reduction was not included in the budget.

Motion: move to adjourn the meeting. Gombos. Coppinger. Approved. Unanimous.

Meeting adjourned at 11:12 p.m.

Submitted by Catherine Gombos, Region 9 Board of Education Secretary

Recorded by Paula Darlington/Vicki Cram