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REGION 9 BOARD OF EDUCATION
Budget Workshop
Joel Barlow Middle School - Library Learning Commons
March 5, 2020 – 7:30 p.m.
Minutes

ATTENDANCE

Region 9 Board Members: Johnston, Graziano (7:53 pm), Berry, D'Agostino, Denny (7:35 pm), Pampel, Williams

Absent: O'Brien

Administration: McMorran, Reiss, Pin, McTague, Santangeli, Roszko, DeAngelo, Desmarais, Panos, Schemm, Czudak, Staron

Others: Members of public, Videographer

CALL TO ORDER

T. Johnston called the Region 9 Board of Education meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the February 18, 2020 Easton, Redding, Region 9 Joint Boards of Education Special Meeting were reviewed. Mr. D'Agostino made an amendment to change "*Mr. Hocker commented...*" to "*Mr. Hocker did not recall*".

Motion: move to accept minutes as amended (D'Agostino, Pampel). Vote 4-0-1. Williams abstained.

Motion: move to accept minutes of 2/18/20 Region 9 Board of Education Regular Meeting (Pampel, D'Agostino). Vote 4-0-1. Williams abstained.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Jeff Fligelman, Pocahontas Road, Redding. Mr. Fligelman questioned why more students did not sign up for Latin. He stated that this is a direct counter to the new seal of biliteracy designation. He noted that the cost to keep 2 sections of Latin is \$17,523.

Jeff Parker, Morning Glory Drive, Easton. Mr. Parker made a statement about the Easton BOF and BOE to address the budget increase that Easton BOE would ask for would be less likely to be approved in totality if the Region 9 board came in with a higher increase than a flat budget. He noted that the town agencies in total were asking for a 5% increase for 2021. He believed Region 9 would have unspent funds in excess of \$622,000 at the end of the 2019-2020 budget year. He proposed that the Easton portion of approximately \$280,000 be returned to the Town be used to offset increases in the Easton BOE budget.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENT

Dr. McMorran addressed the issue of coronavirus in the schools. He asked everyone to remain calm and take a common sense approach. He said that he has been in touch with state and local agencies to track the virus and create a readiness plan to activate if necessary.

The school custodial staff is working to put extra cleaning processes in place. Region 9 uses cleaning supplies which are effective against the virus.

The current plan is to operate as normally as possible, but noted that there may be cancellations of large events if deemed necessary. Finally, Dr. McMorran appealed to the community that the safety of the students is the first priority and that he is working on keeping our students safe.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: PROPOSED 2020-2021 OPERATING BUDGET

Mr. Johnston gave opening remarks about proceedings. The agenda would move forward by category and the Board would provide direction to the staff to model budget scenarios, if necessary.

Dr. Pin started by thanking everyone for their time. She explained that the new budget proposal of 0.98% reflected the elimination of \$60,000; Region 9's share of the proposed new position of K-12 ER9 Assistant Superintendent of Pupil Personnel Services. Total budget presented is \$24,369,537 with a variance of \$236,423.

Dr. Pin shared details of recent developments that took place after the February 18, 2020 budget presentation and impacted the budget. These adjustments added \$1,743 to the budget, for a 0.99% budget at \$24,371,280. Mr. D'Agostino asked about the adjustment for special education. Ms. Roszko stated that it was due to IEP mandated services. A question was directed to Dr. Pin about the new retirement backfill staffing which shows a \$26,048 in savings. Dr. Pin explained this was the difference between the outgoing teacher's salary and a new teacher hired at MA-12 step.

Mr. D'Agostino asked about the re-addition of a .2 FTE in Art. Mr. Schemm commented that they made tough decisions based on data. He said that the staffing document is a fluid document and cannot be finalized until all student course decisions are finalized. He stated that a .2 FTE adds two half-year course selections.

Dr. Pin briefly summarized costs from the Central Office budget. Central Office has the addition of a data analyst position. This position would be split equally among the 3 districts. Mr. D'Agostino asked about position redundancy or overlap. Dr. McMorran stated that there would be no overlap. Ms. Williams inquired about the salary range. Dr. McMorran said that the \$80,000 is comparable in the mid-range for surrounding districts. Mr. Johnston clarified that this is a data analytics position, not a tech support job. Mr. D'Agostino asked if they would analyze Barlow student data. Dr. McMorran commented that $\frac{1}{3}$ of the data analyst's time would be allocated to Barlow. Mrs. Graziano said she is in support of the position to allow all 5 schools to analyze data.

Dr. Pin showed the transportation budget. Mr. D'Agostino commented on the problem in previous years resulting with the athletic transportation budget coming up short. Mr. Santangeli commented that we use a new bus company and costs are reduced due to team consolidations and fewer away matches.

Dr. Pin showed outplacement budget and commented that this is driven by IEP requirements. Mr. D'Agostino asked if there were new students. Ms. Roszko commented that without the full K-12 picture it was hard to know which students would no longer need services. She said that looking at the number of students in programs for 18-21 year olds would show the most student movement for next year. She commented that this program is very cost effective.

Mr. D'Agostino inquired about sizable special education student increases in the pipeline. Ms. Roszko stated there would be an incremental drop next year and a bigger drop in 2022. Dr. McMorran said that they were looking at the Junior Bridge Program in the middle school to build in-house internal capacity and therefore lessen outplacement.

Mr. Reiss discussed debt management and the bonding. Mr. Johnston commented on using the bond premium to pay some of the bond payments for this year. Mr. Reiss stated the bond premium could be used to make bond interest payments. Mr. D'Agostino inquired about the options for using excess funds. Mr. Reiss said the bond premium money can be used on all bond interest payments. He stated that we would owe \$350,000 in interest next year. The bond premium can be applied to the operating budget in 2019-2020 or 2020-2021 reducing the budgeted amount for payments. Discussion ensued.

Ms. Graziano inquired about surplus at the end of the year. Mr. D'Agostino asked what would give the most flexibility. Mr. Reiss stated that the payments were for fixed amounts at fixed times. Mr. D'Agostino asked if we can figure out what interest obligation remains at the end of the 2019-20 year. Mr. Johnston stated that they can apply construction surplus when the Campus Improvements Project completes to bond interest payments.

Dr. Pin showed the operations budget. Mr. D'Agostino inquired about snow plowing. Mr. Czudak stated that we have a fixed snow contract and that this has proved to be the most cost effective over a longer year term. Overages from snow plowing were in excess of \$100,000 some years. A fixed contract allows them to set a budget number and stick with it. Mr. Reiss stated that the fixed contract was best due to loyalty to us as a customer and that the plowing company provided other services such as salting freezing roadways even without snow.

Mr. D'Agostino asked if the new field house proposal would be problematic for custodial staff and if the loss of a custodial position has impacted cleaning. Discussion ensued. Mr. D'Agostino asked what the financial impact was of including 1 FTE custodial staff.

Mr. Reiss went back to address debt management questions. He stated we have 2 more bond interest payments in April and May for a total aggregate cost of \$73,000. \$105,000 is available in bond premium. The \$32,000 would remain after paying extra in 2019-2020 creating \$73,000 excess at the end of the year which could be put into health, capital or pension.

Academic Program Discussion

Mr. D'Agostino asked about the textbook cycle and STEM books purchased included 160 chemistry books. Mr. Schemm stated that old books were not NGSS aligned. Ms. Graziano inquired about lab supplies. Mr. Schemm stated they were already in the budget on different lines.

A discussion of Calculus ensued. The course is not being offered next year due to low enrollment. AP Calc AB and AP Calc BC are being offered. Administration will work to meet the needs of students wishing to take Calculus.

Mr. Johnston asked for discussion on the issue of Latin. Dr. Pin opened the discussion with the statement of 14 current Barlow students and only 4 rising 9th graders enrolled in Latin. Due to commitment to current students, there is a combined level class. Ms. Graziano asked if students had the virtual language option. Dr. Pin said that due to enrollment, only one section of virtual language would run. Mrs. Graziano proposed that we honor the current group and allow the 4 students entering to take Latin until it is no longer offered. Mrs. Denny commented that if we can keep the course offering we will get a higher enrollment. Dr. Pin asked for clarification from the board for if they would like to offer 1 or 2 classes of Latin. Mrs. Berry asked if we could explore the option of opening a Latin I/II class to allow all incoming freshman from both schools to take the class. A discussion of Latin ensued.

Motion: move that the Board direct administration to run two sections of Latin, to open the Latin course to incoming freshman from both districts by offering Latin I/II introductory class, with an increase of \$17,523, .2 FTE to World Language (D'Agostino, Pampel). Vote 4-3. Approved. Johnston, Graziano. Williams opposed.

Mrs. Denny asked about \$4,000 appropriated for late start time study. Dr. McMorran stated that each district would pay \$4,000 and the proposal is large enough to engage all stakeholders.

Mrs. Graziano expressed concern about core class sizes.

Discussion of Athletics

Mr. D'Agostino asked if there was a way to use less consumables in athletics. Mr. Santangeli assured the board that we are tracking consumables and using a reasonable amount.

Mr. D'Agostino inquired about why we were cutting basketball and that he would like to see it added back in. Mr. Johnston confirmed the Board wanted to add back in freshman boys and girls basketball.

Discussion of Subs

Mr. D'Agostino asked if \$50,000 was accurate. A discussion ensued. Dr. Pin will elaborate on substitute numbers used daily and consider adding some funding back into this line.

Mr. D'Agostino and Ms. Williams voiced concern about eliminating the secretary in the counseling department. Mr. D'Agostino asked what the position would impact on student scheduling. Mrs. Williams asked if tasks could be reallocated. Dr. Pin referenced the February 18th presentation and said major tasks could be highlighted again at the next meeting.

All members asked for further discussion time considering line item adding back summer days for department chairs and counselors.

Mr. D'Agostino asked about adding in 1 FTE for custodial staff, looking into the cost.

Mr. Johnston reiterated using bond premium funds to pay bond interest obligations at a reduction of \$73,000 this fiscal year. Mr. Reiss stated confirmed the direction to make the last two interest payments from bond premium instead of the budget and then use the remaining \$32,000 to reduce the 2020 - 2021 budget.

Mr. Johnston recapped the addition of \$17,523 .2 FTE in Latin, \$17,890 Freshman Basketball. He also noted items for further discussion would include subs, secretary in counseling, summer admin days, and reinstating the custodian.

Mrs. Graziano asked if the pension and health insurance reserve was still on the table. Further discussion required.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Ethan Grey, Pocahontas Road, Redding, thanked the board for their decision on Latin. He was glad they want what is best for the kids.

Jeff Fligelman, Pocahontas Road, Redding, thanked the Board for giving all 9th graders the opportunity to take Latin.

Carol Murray, Sport Hill Road, Redding, stated she echoed the sentiments of others and thanked the Board.

Joanne Gray, Lonetown Road, Redding, said "thank you" to the Board. She and her children thank you for adding back Latin and Calculus.

BOARD COMMENT

Mr. Johnston, Mr. D'Agostino and Mrs. Graziano all thanked everyone. Mrs. Graziano added that she was especially excited for basketball.

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: move that the Region 9 Board of Education budget workshop meeting be adjourned (Pampel, Denny). Approved. Unanimous.

The Region 9 Board of Education budget workshop meeting was adjourned at 11:07 p.m.

Recorded by and Submitted by,
Juliette Berry, Region 9 Board of Education Secretary