

**MANCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION**

**BUDGET WORKSHOP**

**Thursday, January 27, 2022**

6:00 p.m.

Lincoln Center/Virtual

**PRESENT:** Eisenthal, Kohls, Meggers, Mix, Ntem-Mensah, Orsene, Pattacini, Patterson, Stefanovicz

**ALSO**

**PRESENT:** Superintendent of Schools Geary and Director of Finance & Management Clancy

**ABSENT:**

**A. CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order at 6:04 p.m. by Tracy Patterson, Chair of the Personnel & Finance Committee.

**B. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Ms. Patterson led everyone in the Pledge of Allegiance.

**C. SUPERINTENDENT'S RECOMMENDED BUDGET**

**Mr. Geary** reviewed that this is basically the third budget workshop. This evening he will review Capital Repairs; Capital Projects; Capital Plan; Utilities; Supplies; Vehicles; and Security Upgrades. He will also look at the Living Wage Goal Data requested by Ms. Stefanovicz. Mr. Geary's presentation is available for viewing on the website.

There were several questions emailed to Mr. Geary after the last meeting and the written answers include:

- **What are the costs for the health benefits for just the administrators? Out of the \$17million in health benefits, how much is attributed to the administrators and how much to certified teachers?** Mr. Geary presented a chart with all single, two-person and family plans for each group of staff. He noted that in addition to the cost of the portion of policy paid by the Board of Education, the

Board also contributes \$1000 to the HSA of those with single coverage and an additional \$1000 to those with two-person or family coverage.

- **Are any administrators receiving any additional benefits?** Mr. Geary reviewed that 52 administrators in the administrator union receive a \$1,500 annuity contribution; 3 non-affiliated administrators receive \$5,000 annuity contributions; 3 Deputy/Assistant Superintendents receive \$10,000 annuity contributions; and the Superintendent receives an \$18,500 annuity contribution per his contract.
- **Which employees received the \$388,000 in overtime pay in the 21-22 actual cost? What were the reasons for authorized overtime?** A wide variety of non-certified employees receive overtime due to various needs. Paraprofessionals, Behavior GTEchs, and Tutors have covered classrooms and served as bus monitors, lengthening their work day. Maintenance and custodial staff worked significant overtime at the end of summer due to the length of summer school. Those staff also worked overtime to complete building projects at MMA and to clean buildings where staff members are absent. Nurses and secretaries also have worked overtime to support significant contact tracing this year.
- **How many hall monitors will be employed in the next budget for \$282,000? Where are they located and are they authorized to write detentions? Why do we need hall monitors if we have security and SROs? Why do we need hall monitors if we have security and SROs?** There are 4 hall monitors at Illing and 5 at MHS. They can write behavior referrals, but do not assign detentions. They work along with security staff and SROs to provide the necessary security for our large buildings.
- **How do you explain certified teachers making \$52,000 a year and custodians making \$55,000 a year with no Master's Degree?** Teachers advance on a salary schedule as their years of experience increase. The Board is entering contract negotiations with teachers and we continue to work to raise the salary of beginning teachers. At the same time, custodians and maintainers provide necessary and critical services in our schools.
- **What hourly rate is paid for legal services? Are legal services put out to competitive bid? Has the BOE considered hiring in-house legal services?** The hourly rates we pay range from \$210-\$435 for Shipman & Goodwin. The Board has not considered hiring in-house legal services as the multiple areas of expertise in educational law provided by the Shipman & Goodwin attorneys who advise the Board and the administration are critical in taking the proper steps that prevent litigation. They advise us and also contribute to contract negotiations.

**Mr. Pattacini** felt it would be helpful to understand what is currently funded in ESSER that we may want to keep long-term. Mr. Geary stated that ultimately as our Alliance Grant funding increases we will begin to move those items to the Alliance Grant line.

**Mr. Geary** reviewed the specifics of the Supplies and Utilities lines, noting that we have some supplies left from when we were not allowing students to share which will help going forward. He also noted that utility lines can be volatile but we were comfortable flat funding there based on recent bills.

Next, Equipment/Dues & Fees was reviewed. This includes items like chromebooks, which are replaced in three grades each year. K-2nd graders use I pads which have a four year replacement cycle. Last year laptops were donated to seniors, which made online learning easier. We also fund some of the replacement with grant funding.

Capital Projects is another line that is a percentage of the overall budget. Recently, we have had bonus Alliance funding to do many repairs that were needed. We always try to find creative ways to fund projects. With surplus ESSER monies we are doing air quality work, primarily at the high school.

Mr. Geary then reviewed the vehicle purchase plan and security upgrade line.

Regarding the living wage he explained the way he came up with figures, and that he used the paraprofessional group as an example. Overall, to increase the average salary to a single person/0 children living wage would be about a 20% increase. Other groups that would fall below the living wage in some instances would be food service workers and noon aides.

Overall, the 21-22 budget was \$122,422,774.93. The proposed 22-23 budget is \$117,774,174. This represents an increase of \$4,648,600.93 or 3.95%. Mr. Geary reminded us that of that increase, about \$1.8 million is an increase in Special Education and about \$450,000 represents an increase in transportation costs. The rest of the increase are contractual obligations as we try to stay competitive in the education world.

The plan is to answer questions both this evening and at the start of the next Board Meeting on February 3rd. Hopefully we will be able to pass the budget that evening as it has to be given to the town by February 14th. If we are unable to pass the budget on the 3rd we would be on a tight timeline as our next Board meeting is not until the day the budget is due to the Town Manager, 2/14.

**Mr. Eisenthal** mentioned the \$700,000 increase in the health insurance line, noting that while we have done a good job controlling those costs, that is a budget buster. He wondered how utilities are paid for. Mr. Geary noted we encumber the full amount and adjust the encumbrance as needed. This is done every month or two.

**Ms. Stefanovicz** wondered if the "21-22 actual" numbers were an estimate of

what we will spend this year. Mr. Geary stated that some of the number comes from known items and the rest are estimated.

Ms. Stefanovicz wondered if it was possible to use ESSER funds to pay for something like the need for additional classrooms at Bennet and Illing due to the pandemic necessitating smaller class sizes. Mr. Geary thought we could possibly make a case for that.

Ms. Stefanovicz asked how we pay for overages in lines. Mr. Geary noted that we sometimes have to freeze the budget around this time of year and move money from other lines. This year, with the addition of federal funding, we were able to avoid a budget freeze.

Ms. Stefanovicz referred to a road bond mentioned by Mr. Geary, asking for more details. Mr. Geary reviewed that the Board of Education had asked early last winter for the town to add the bleacher replacements to the road bond they were looking to fund. The need for replacement bleachers had to do mostly with capacity (for events like graduation). The Town Manager agreed to add that funding request, but ultimately the Director's cut it from their bond.

Ms. Stefanovicz thought the living wage information was fantastic. She would love to start working to move towards this goal. Currently the minimum pay for a para is about \$13/hr. The living wage for a single adult with no children is \$15.30/hr. She wondered what it would look like if we simply moved everyone up the difference (ie \$2.30). Mr. Geary noted that the teacher's contract allows for some flexibility to account for experience in bringing in new teachers, but the other contracts are a simple step advancement. We do not want to create a large gap between the second to last and last step.

It was noted that the minimum wage in Connecticut will jump to \$14/hr. on July 1st and then June 1, 2023 it will become \$15/hr.

**Mr. Kohls** does not feel \$435/hr. is reasonable for attorney's fees. He feels we could get an experienced attorney in-house for less money. Mr. Geary disagreed, noting that we use the Shipman & Goodwin attorneys for many different reasons, including labor relations, contract negotiations, personnel matters, covid-related issues, and special education support among some of them. To find one attorney well versed in all of those topics would be impossible. It could be very costly in the end. Mr. Geary pointed out that the teacher's contract is going to be negotiated this year. Four Board members are on the team for negotiations and it will provide a feel for how much an attorney provides during negotiations. Mr. Kohls just wants to save money where it can be saved.

**Ms. Patterson** wondered how covid might impact the utility line in 22-23 as well as having a net zero school online for the first time. Mr. Geary stated that

utilities are tricky to predict. In the 19-20 year, when we closed, we did use less energy. We have not considered how the net zero building will impact us because it takes time to get a building up and running to see the real numbers. Ms. Clancy added that we are also undergoing a Town lighting efficiency project which is replacing all bulbs in town buildings with LED lights. This will provide even more savings.

Ms. Patterson asked about the cost of broken chromebooks and ipads, along with lost cords and such. Mr. Geary noted we do not charge parents for replacing such items. Those types of things are funded under the computer equipment line though, not here. Next, she asked about the dues and fees. Mr. Geary noted that district memberships, such as to NEASC, are paid with this line, as well as field trip admissions.

Ms. Patterson asked for clarification of the number of lines per administrator. Mr. Geary clarified one administrator may cover several lines as their salary may be partially funded in grants, they may receive a stipend for a doctoral degree, etc.

**Mr. Geary** again reviewed the budget timeline and stated that we need to know tonight, or February 3rd, where we are in terms of the recommended budget as we need to prepare the final budget to give to the General Manager by February 14th.

#### **D. Public Participation**

Mr. Tom Stringfellow, 183 Hillstown Road, welcomed Mr. Ntem-Mensah to the Board. He enjoyed the report on the budget. Regarding school safety he mentioned ransomware and malware. He touched on the Hartford overdose of a student, wondering if Narcan was available to have in schools to prevent such a death from occurring here. Mr. Stringfellow mentioned other medical conditions, TikTok copycat vandalism events and childcare costs. He asked parents to lead by example and not threats. Last, Mr. Stringfellow recommended a book, *Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man*.

#### **E. Closing Comments - Board Members**

**Ms. Stefanovicz** is a proponent of second chances and liked Mr. Stringfellow's recommendation of Narcan. Mr. Geary stated they were already investigating this possibility pre-pandemic and are working on it. Ms. Stefanovicz is also hoping for some creative ways to give a little higher wage for those low-income earners. She prefers no programs get cut in favor of this though.

**Mr. Kohls** was disconcerted that a Hartford child died of a overdose. Children are growing up in a challenging environment. This budget talk is new territory for him. He wondered if we can start at a zero budget and work up, is that practical? Mr. Geary noted some lines can start at zero, but for others that is not

practical or realistic. It also represents a small percentage of the overall budget and would be time consuming to do and would tighten our flexibility. Mr. Geary explained to Mr. Kohls that it is our job to say what we need to run the district properly and the Board of Directors then say what the taxpayers can afford. At that point, if our budget is cut, we get down to the nitty gritty and find ways to cut here and there without major impact if possible.

**Mr. Pattacini** noted the budget process is on a timeline and we need to adopt this budget next week on February 3rd. We need to give feedback and work towards adoption as a group. Mr. Pattacini thanked the administration for their work. Every year the Superintendent looks at how to best support the needs of our students and finds creative and efficient ways to maximize our grant funds. We do not want to derail this excellent budget or ignore the Superintendent's expertise. I support this budget and I ask the other members of the Board to work with the Board of Directors to help them understand our needs and priorities.

**Mr. Geary** also pointed out that there is a reevaluation of property going on and a new mill rate is being considered. There are additional unknowns due to this. Nobody wants taxes to rise. Mr. Geary thanked Mrs. Clancy and her staff, the department heads, and other administrators who have worked hard on this budget.

**F. ADJOURNMENT**

**The meeting was adjourned at 7:17 p.m.**

Respectfully submitted,

Tracy Patterson  
Chair, Personnel and Finance Committee