

MANCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION
BUDGET WORKSHOP

Wednesday, January 29, 2020

6:00 p.m.

Manchester High School – Room 293

PRESENT: Gundersen, Heinrich, Hughes, Meggers, Pattacini, Patterson, Thames

ALSO PRESENT: Superintendent of Schools Geary, Deputy Superintendent & Special Services Radikas, Director of Finance & Management Clancy

ABSENT: Scappaticci, Stefanovicz

A. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:07 p.m. by Darryl Thames, Snr., co-chair of the Personnel & Finance Committee. Twenty-four seconds of silence to honor Kobe Bryant and those lost this week in the tragic accident were observed.

B. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

All in attendance participated in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag, led by Mr. Thames.

C. SUPERINTENDENT'S BUDGET PRESENTATION

Mr. Geary reviewed that this evening he will discuss supplies, utilities and equipment, which is a small portion of the total budget. The Board of Education proposed budget for the 2020/2021 School Year is \$121,017,593. This is an increase of \$4,486,356 over the current year's budget, which represents a 3.85% increase. However, with the increase in ECS money of \$1,200,000, the actual budget increase is \$3,286,356, which represents a 2.82% increase.

Mr. Geary reviewed the supplies, utilities and equipment budget lines in depth. The full budget proposal is available online. Mr. Geary noted that for items such as these, there is a per pupil amount given to each principal to work with. At the elementary level it is \$150 per pupil, \$225 at the middle school, and \$325 at the high school. When there are budgetary issues the supply lines are typically the ones that get frozen.

Overall, the new things in the budget this year include the 50 in 5 program

proposal, the wellness initiatives for staff, security upgrades, two new hall monitors (Illing and Martin). There are also some certified and non-certified salaries that have shifted in part to the Board budget due to shifts and reductions in grant funding.

Mr. Meggers wondered if we use textbooks or E books more. Mr. Geary and Dr. Radikas explained that both are used, as typically, when you buy a title, it comes with a 7 year subscription to an electronic version for a minimal upgrade. The benefit to this is that the electronic version gets updated regularly. It also means students don't necessarily have to lug home a heavy book if they need to access information.

Mr. Meggers is a proponent of athletics and supports new uniforms. He wondered if that department is well funded. Mr. Geary noted we are in good shape and that Mr. Boutilier does a good job at advocating for his athletes.

Mr. Meggers agreed that keeping up the grounds at the newly renovated buildings is important.

Mr. Pattacini asked which line is funded with the per pupil amounts. Mr. Geary explained it is spread across the operating budget of the school. This amount has remained stable historically. Principals are given some guidance as to which percentage of the money has to be earmarked for specific lines and they have some discretion on how to earmark the rest of their budget.

Mr. Pattacini was concerned that principals may be distracted by the budget. He is glad to see we are managing the areas we can and were able to make reductions. He thanked the administration for their efforts. Mr. Pattacini wondered if Mr. Geary could confirm that the lines covered under board policy, requiring a specific amount of the budget, were being met. Mr. Geary stated all those lines are fully funded. As the actual budget changes so often during this time, he chose to fund those lines based on a percentage of the last budget, so as to have a fixed number.

Mr. Pattacini wants to support the 50 in 5 program. Mr. Geary noted they are still talking with the attorneys about appropriate language for the contracts and how to enforce a 5 year commitment.

Mr. Gundersen asked if the budget line for textbooks was for a new text or to replace existing texts. Mr. Geary noted this is for an AP History replacement and Dr. Radikas noted that it had been approved last year, but as there were no funds it was being pushed to next year's budget. Mr. Geary added that in the K-5 or 6 grades, many of their "texts" are consumable workbooks which are funded through an instructional supplies line. We do not spend a lot on actual textbooks.

Mr. Gundersen wondered how the chrome books were funded and how often they are used. Mr. Geary stated they like to replace the chromebooks every 3-4 years if possible and funding depends on available grants. In grades 9-12 each student has their own chromebooks. In grades K-8 chromebooks are kept as classroom carts, so students can access them as dictated by the curriculum.

Mr. Gundersen wondered about the required repairs at the high school and if we hire outside people to assess needs at each school. He also asked about other pending critical repairs. Mr. Geary reviewed that the last Facilities Director had listed the pending repairs and many were or will be addressed through building renovations. If a repair becomes critical, obviously we will tackle that sooner (such as the curb issue at Bowers). When a new Facilities Director is hired, Mr. Geary will recommend they get an outside analysis on the older part of the high school and Illing. This would be funded out of capital repairs.

Mr. Thames wondered about the noon aides. Mr. Geary reviewed that the food services department is fully self funded and has to spend their surplus when directed by the state. Last year we were able to use some of those monies to pay for some noon aides. The surplus was used, so now those positions are simply reverting to the Board budget.

Mr. Thames noted he is an advocate for school athletic uniforms and wondered if the change in mascot necessitated any new uniforms. He also encouraged Board members to attend some games. Mr. Geary noted none of the current uniforms had the old mascot on them, so there was no need to replace uniforms for that reason. The new uniforms, however, will show the new mascot.

Mr. Thames asked for clarity on the two non-certified positions returning to the Board budget due to a decrease in the Hartford Foundation for Public Givings reduction in grant funding. Mr. Geary stated there was a secretary/registrar at the Welcome Center along with part of the salary of Erin Ortega, who is the Coordinator of Programming, Planning and Development.

Mr. Thames is in favor of the 50 in 5 initiative. It is a good opportunity to grow our own and make the school environment more comfortable for our parents.

Mr. Geary asked for a sense of whether Board members feel ready to pass this proposed budget or if they have any lingering questions that he needs to prepare for the February 10th meeting. He noted that the budget is due to the Town by 2/14. Last year the state budget was late in being completed, but this is the second year of that budget, so he is confident in the amount of ECS funding we are expecting.

Mr. Pattacini stated he is prepared to support this proposed budget as

outlined, especially including the 50 in 5 program. This evening Board members received the Annual Operations and Performance Report from the Town. He noted that last year the town anticipated needing to pull about \$2 million from reserves, but ultimately turned back about \$2 million, which is a tribute to the work the town is doing. Mr. Pattacini feels ours is a reasonable budget request.

Mr. Thames is also prepared to support the budget.

Mr. Meggers asked for a break. The workshop took a 20 minute break.

Upon returning from the break, Mr. Meggers noted that he, along with Mr. Gundersen and Mr. Hughes were not yet ready to approve this proposal.

Mr. Gundersen has serious concerns about the 50 in 5 program and does not believe it has been vetted enough. He does not believe this idea will result in improved test scores. He also notes we won't know for 5 years if we have any results. Mr. Gundersen does not personally feel that a teacher of color would make any difference in the outcome of student work or help the students better understand their educational subjects. Mr. Gundersen's bigger concern with the 50 in 5 program is that participants may change their mind, and so we may not have the outcome we intend. He believes some will try to take advantage of the money.

Mr. Gundersen went on to say that every year he sees the budget rise for the Board of Ed, yet nothing much is changing in student achievement. He does not currently see anything that is really going to change the crisis our school system is in.

Mr. Thames asked for suggested changes to the budget.

Mr. Gundersen that some 5th graders are reading at a 4th or 3rd grade level or even lower. He thinks more educators and tutors should be hired to help solve the problem. He is also not a proponent of promoting every child to the next grade and noted that his child was held back one grade and it was the best thing to happen to him, so he could master the work and not always be behind.

Mr. Gundersen feels like he is not seeing anything creative from the administration to deal with the crisis in our schools. He does not see solutions to any of our problems in this budget.

It was pointed out by Mr. Thames that some increases to the budget are contractual or out of our hands.

Mr. Gundersen noted that over the last 10-15 years the number of students in the district has decreased, yet the budget continues to increase. He also pointed

out that in the past when student numbers dropped we did not offer back monies to the Town or State.

Ms. Patterson wondered if the drop in the number of students in our district correlated with the increase of magnet schools. She asked about how much is spent on outplacements. Mr. Geary noted about \$8 million is spent on outplacements, some of which are at magnet schools. We still pay for our students that attend magnets.

Ms. Patterson appreciated the depth of the information presented. It was easily understood. We all want our student's performance to improve and the education of our students is of the utmost importance. Ms. Patterson sees this budget as a way to improve student outcomes, including investing in the wellness of our staff. Every day that a staff member is absent impacts a student's achievement. Ms. Patterson also noted there are countless studies that show diversity of staff improves performance, both in the workplace and in schools. She would like to see an investment in the 50 in 5 program or something else has to be done. This is in line with what the town has invested in. There have been multiple workshops over the last few months with a critical focus on diversity and inclusion efforts in Manchester. There is a changing dynamic in town and leadership needs to reflect that. She can bring studies that show the impact of diversity and inclusion for the next meeting.

Mr. Pattacini reemphasized his perspective that echoes Ms. Patterson about the research showing the impact on students to have someone who looks like them as a role model. He encouraged other Board members to do their own research on the topic. Mr. Pattacini recalled a *NY Times* article a couple years ago that showed students do better with a teacher who looks like them. We have struggled with how to effectively implement that.

Mr. Pattacini takes exception to anyone that says our administration has not been creative. We have many many creative, strategic moves and our work is not done. He recognizes that more work is needed, but is comfortable supporting the administration in the work being done. Mr. Pattacini noted that over the last five years our administration has implemented Family Resource Centers, student centered learning, and Imagine College to name a few creative programs. We have a forward-thinking administration. Our test scores need improvement, but not unlike any other district. He has seen creative and structural changes in our system improve reading outcomes, which is the first step to improving other outcomes. We are moving the needle and there is no overnight fix. Mr. Pattacini feels our money has been well spent and progress is being made. Every year we see more creative ideas to help move the needle more. It is incumbent upon this Board to support those programs, this year the 50 in 5 program. There is some risk, but research shows students perform better with a teacher that looks like them.

Mr. Pattaicini went on to remind the Board that this is not the end all be all budget. These are recommendations and the Board of Directors may not fully fund this budget. We will be in a better position if we include the 50 in 5 funding, even though we may find alternative funding sources. After the Board of Directors passes the budget we have more budget workshops to refine our final budget. However, time is of the essence now to approve the recommended budget and get it to the town in a timely manner.

Mr. Thames noted the purpose of the budget is to propel the school system through the next year. Key cost drivers are certified and non-certified salaries, which are all contractual, pension, special education tuition, and board policies dictating mandatory funding. Recruiting a diverse staff is part of the vision of Manchester Public Schools. It is counter-intuitive to ask for creativity and then say it's too risky. It is a risk. Creativity means doing something that we haven't done before based on a hypothesis. Mr. Thames currently has two grandchildren in Manchester Public Schools and he is concerned about academic outcomes. Another highlight of creative programs is the five academies that were added at the high school in recent years, to help focus students with particular interests. Sometimes new programs are funded by outside sources and if they are kept eventually have to be funded by the Board budget. Mr. Thames is in favor of this budget.

Mr. Geary stated he needed direction on any information Board members want to see for the next meeting, other than the idea of retention of students.

Mr. Hughes wondered how to make suggested changes to the budget.

Mr. Geary needs to know ASAP of any specific suggestions to change specific line items.

Mr. Pattacini stated the practical reality - the Board needs consensus around any alternative proposals. We were supposed to have done that this evening, as it is harder in the boardroom to vet out any proposals.

Mr. Meggers felt he needed more time to review the information.

D. PUBLIC COMMENTS

None.

E. CLOSING COMMENTS

Mr. Thames reviewed the budget workshops where we present our requests to the Board of Directors are set for March 4 and March 19. He encouraged Board members to attend. If our budget is reduced by the town, we will have a series of additional budget workshops in May.

G. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:05 p.m. by Mr. Thames.

Respectfully submitted,

Christopher Pattacini
Board Secretary