

MANCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION
BUDGET WORKSHOP

Wednesday, May 31, 2017

6:00 p.m.

Manchester High School – Room 293

PRESENT: Caldwell, Conyers, Hagenow, Jacobsen, Leon, Pattacini,
Scappaticci, Stefanovicz, Thames

ALSO PRESENT: Superintendent of Schools Geary, Director of Finance &
Management Clancy

ABSENT:

A. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:04 p.m. by Neal Leon, co-chair of the Personnel & Finance Committee.

B. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

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

C. OPENING REMARKS

Mr. Leon reminded us this is the 3rd and final budget workshop.

D. SUPERINTENDENT'S BUDGET PRESENTATION

Mr. Geary passed out an updated version of the proposed budget cuts. He pointed out that he put back in one of the FTE MHS teachers (for Music) was put back in, which will provide for guitar class among other music electives. This changes the reduction in that line for \$156,486 to \$105,461.

Mr. Geary felt that Saturday Math, while an important program, should still be cut unless we receive full Alliance Funding. If we receive the Alliance funds we can investigate reinstating that program. He also pointed out that low level math for the 17-18 school year will be co-taught, to provide a 9/1 ratio in the classroom.

Another new cut is part of a secretarial position, for a savings of \$30,000, and a cancellation of the CABE membership for \$21,000.

Mr. Conyers asked for clarification of the reduction of the 15 instructional coaches, wondering if all 15 would retain jobs in the district. Mr. Geary noted between vacancies and bumping they would. The concern is the least senior teachers that may be bumped, but Mr. Geary hopes that with the retirement incentive there will be enough openings that all will retain positions. Mr. Conyers also noted he is fine with cancelling the CABE membership.

Mr. Caldwell wondered what the plan would be if the magnet tuitions rise more than expected. Mr. Geary noted we might have to freeze the budget and make additional cuts.

Mr. Caldwell wondered if with the early retirement incentive, if coaches fill those spots, would the saving be less. Mr. Geary noted he anticipated that and the figure in the budget reduction adjusts for that.

Mr. Scappaticci noted that if we receive full Alliance funding we will reinstate Saturday Math and asked if Mr. Geary had a sense of when we would know about the funding. Mr. Geary said we would know once the state budget is passed, so hopefully in the next couple of weeks. Mr. Scappaticci is also fine with the reduction of the CABE membership, noting conferences can still be attended at a slightly higher rate.

Ms. Hagenow, who was not at the last meeting, asked for clarity about the bottom additional cuts. Mr. Geary explained those cuts were for the funding of behavioral supports in buildings. Ms. Hagenow is also in favor of dropping the CABE membership.

Mr. Pattacini wondered if the teacher's union had replied to the request for a wage freeze. Mr. Geary reached out to Mr. Nicholas and was told he has not had an executive meeting yet. Mr. Geary also reached out to the other unions as well to ask for concessions, however he has not heard back.

Mr. Pattacini also asked if all the other districts are members of CABE. Mr. Geary noted there was no way to find that out, but he suspects many other districts are also facing tough budget seasons and that this discussion will be had in other towns as well. Mr. Pattacini wondered if we decide to rejoin CABE would we have to pay more. It was thought there would just be the regular membership fee.

Mr. Pattacini noted that with the potential additional savings added, there is approximately \$401,000 to fund the behavioral classrooms, so we are still a little short and he wondered how that would be reconciled. Mr. Geary noted we would trim back on the desired behavioral supports to match the amount of funding and it would be outlined in the actual budget.

Mr. Pattacini wondered the amounts below the Board minimum we are looking at for technology and capital projects. Mr. Geary estimated the capital repairs line we are looking at about \$250,000 below and in technology about \$105,000 below. Mr. Pattacini reminded the Board members that we will need a 2/3 vote to rescind the policies applicable.

Mr. Thames concurs that the CAFE membership is currently not affordable. They do great work, but we have tough decisions to make. Regarding the cutting of the Adult Ed coordinator, what impact would that have on the program. Mr. Geary noted the part-time person that coordinates the Continuing Education will be cut. There may be some reduction in the offerings. Mr. Thames wondered if the workforce partners courses would be impacted and Mr. Geary felt those are offered through the Adult Ed side and that the cuts to Continuing Ed are mostly enrichment type courses.

Ms. Jacobsen has heard from both teachers and students that support Saturday Math. She would like to see that stay in our budget, because if we don't get the Alliance funding we won't have that extra support for our struggling students. She has also heard about the need to maintain the coaches. She wonders, between coaches, tutors, literacy positions there are about 115 positions. She wondered if any of those positions could be streamlined in order to save more coaches.

Ms. Jacobsen also wondered if the librarians in the elementary school are certified and what their job description is. Mr. Geary noted library media specialists are certified and have an essential role. They push into classrooms to provide technical support, personalized learning and technology. The para in the library does the more clerical work, checks in and out the books and works with the children as well, but many of these spots are shared between buildings.

Ms. Jacobsen wondered how much would be saved if the teacher's union made concessions and should we wait to finalize the budget until hearing from them. Mr. Geary noted we have no way to know what concessions would be made, if any, and we need to adopt the budget by June 12th. Hopefully the unions would decide before then. Some concessions could be a wage freeze, furlough days, or other items. We wouldn't know what, if any, concessions they would consider at this point.

Ms. Stefanovicz would love to see creative placements of outplaced students back into district behavioral classrooms to make up the \$31,000 shortfall in that line. As for Saturday Math, she had emails from students who benefitted from the class and she was very impressed they cared enough to write. She would like to see that item solidified prior to June 12th.

Mr. Leon noted he is in favor of dropping CABE. As for the \$500,000 we froze to return to the town, he wondered if we have any additional funds left at the end of the year, could we use those to go towards computers prior to the last fiscal day. Mr. Geary noted we always have POs ready and waiting for the last day of the fiscal year, and computers are among the items on the list. We have no idea how much money will be available.

Mr. Leon noted that the unions have no incentive to give concessions. They negotiated their contracts in good faith and he would not expect any concessions from them.

Mr. Pattacini noted there was a fair amount of consensus on the budget so far. He wondered about Saturday Math and Mr. Geary noted that Algebra 1 will be co-taught with a 9/1 ratio and they are also looking at the Algebra 1 curriculum.

Mr. Thames asked how many students took Saturday Math this year. Mr. Tierini had about 129 in the course, with additional students just coming for the mid-term or final review.

E. PUBLIC COMMENTS

James Tierini, 106 Henry Street, is the program coordinator for Saturday Math. Since the last budget meeting he has sent Board members reports, data and pictures with information about the program. This program provides a unique opportunity to strengthen student's math comprehension. It also offers exam review for all students. The failure rate on mid-terms has dropped across all levels. He hopes the Board members will take the time to review the data and student emails they received. Mr. Tierini also pointed out that the co-taught classes, while beneficial, are more often in CP (college prep) classes and not as often offered in PSP (post-secondary prep) classes.

Student - Equondo, took Saturday Math as a freshman and brought his grade up from a D to a B. He is now a senior and is taking pre-Calc. He noted that regular math classes often have too many students to get significant help from the teacher and Saturday Math is a good opportunity for students and shouldn't be cancelled. He doesn't particularly like math, but the program helped him achieve his goals. It was good to bond with teachers outside the normal school day and he feels Saturday programs should be offered in other subjects as well. We should strive to improve education and he noted many other countries and states don't have this opportunity.

Greg DeNies, 62 Pitkin Street, was curious about the \$50,000 reduction in consultants, wondering if there was any room to reduce that further as they do not have a direct impact on the students. Mr. DeNies, who is a PE teacher, knows that math and literacy is constantly change and wondered if there are any new programs planned for the next year that could be pushed off in order to

lessen the need for PD, new curriculum to purchase, etc.

Diane Ozman, of Colchester, is a Numeracy Coach at Martin for the past 4 years and prior to that was a 4th grade teacher at Verplanck for 8 years. She has attended many workshops, professional developments, and other programs for the students. Manchester Public Schools made an investment in preparing her for her job and she is passionate about it. Coaches support teacher's growth and that in turn impacts student achievement. She works closely with teachers to raise their confidence and in turn the student's confidence. This helps students understand math skills and concepts which prepares them for real-world problem solving. The investment Manchester Public Schools made in the coaching staff would be significantly devalued with the reduction of 15 coaches.

F. CLOSING COMMENTS

Mr. Conyers supports saving Saturday Math and feels it is worth of reconsideration.

Mr. Caldwell also supports Saturday Math and is in favor of dropping CABE. Last week Ms. Stefanovicz had suggested freezing the non-affiliated wages (instead of dropping them from 2% to 1%) in order to save Saturday Math. He wondered if some of the early retirement savings might also be used to support the program. The topics he has heard the most support for have been to save the coaches and the math program.

Ms. Stefanovicz wondered if the non-affiliated staff have received raises the last 3 years. They have. This would be the first year of potentially not having a raise. Mr. Geary pointed out one reason he is against dropping them from 1% to 0 is because they are trying to move them to an HSA, which would impact them and provide additional savings to the Board. He doesn't want to hit them twice.

Ms. Jacobsen is also in favor of dropping CABE. She wondered if we always hire at the lowest level, or do we sometimes pay higher for new teachers. Mr. Geary noted that unless it is a shortage area, such as Science, World Language, or Math, we try not to hire at too high a level. In shortage areas we often have no choice but to consider hiring at upper levels.

Mr. Thames asked for an explanation of HSA. Mr. Geary explained that over the last 3-4 years most unions have been moved to a Health Savings Account where both the Board and the individual contribute. This means the Board pays less (about 80-85%) and it saves the Board considerable money. Mr. Thames wondered if this impacts the TOMMIF account. Mr. Geary noted all insurance monies flow through that account, but the HSA impacts the employee and the Board.

Mr. Thames notes that concessions typically have a give and take and he does not see the teachers volunteering concessions with no benefit.

Mr. Thames thinks Mr. Geary did a great job on the budget and made some difficult decisions. He was impressed with the student emails he received about Saturday Math and he hopes, since it is a miniscule amount of the total budget, that we could finance that program.

Mr. Pattacini thanked the staff and students who have advocated and shared their experiences and perspectives. Mr. Pattacini supports the Superintendent's recommended budget cuts as outlined. While he appreciated the feedback on the Saturday Math program, we are making an investment in math with the co-teaching classes and so he supports cutting the Saturday program. We have to make tough decisions.

Mr. Leon appreciates all the feedback received and he applauds the audience and others who emailed about Saturday Math. While he hopes that program can be continued through the Alliance Grant, he would rather put Board budget dollars towards saving coaches. He feels coaches effect more students than the Saturday Math program does. If Board members would like to see the program saved, he suggests they suggest specific items to cut in its place.

G. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 7:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jason Scappaticci
Board Secretary