

**BOARD OF ALDERMEN
BUDGET DELIBERATIONS SESSION
BOARD OF EDUCATION PRESENTATION
APRIL 25, 2011**

The Board of Aldermen held a budget deliberation session on Monday, April 25, 2011 in the aldermanic chambers of City Hall. Chairman G. Smith welcomed everyone to the meeting of the proposed budget for the Board of Education for fiscal year 2010-2011. He asked those present to join in saluting our flag and reciting the Pledge of allegiance and to remain standing for a moment of silence for the men and women serving our country.

1. Roll Call

Board Members Present

B. Bevan
B. Blake
D. German
A. Giannattasio
F. Goodrich, Jr.
M. Hardiman
B. Joy, Jr.
J. Patterson
G. Smith
P. Smith
P. Staneski
N. Veccharelli
P. Vetro
R. Vitali

Also Present

Mayor J. Richetelli, Jr.
L. Stock, City Clerk

Excused

B. Bier

Ald. Vetro and Ald. Patterson made and seconded a motion to come out of recess at 7:10 p.m. Motion carried unanimously.

Chairman G. Smith stated the budget has been thoroughly reviewed which produced the Board of Finance's recommended budget. He stated the Board has heard several other budget presentations from the various City Departments. He stated tonight the Board would hear the presentation of the Board of Education. Chairman G. Smith welcomed Dr. Elizabeth Feser, new Superintendent of Schools, Michael Cummings, Assistant Superintendent of Schools, Philip Russell, Associate Superintendent of Schools, Susan Kelleher, Pupil Personnel and Dr. Mark Stapleton, Chairman, Board of Education.

Dr. Stapleton reading from a prepared statement stated he is here to night to advocate for the needs of the Milford Public Schools. He stated he realized the difficult economic times facing the taxpayer. He continued reading stating he and administration would be happy to answer. He stated they are excellent stewards of Milford tax dollars. He also addressed the consequences of reduction of the proposed budget. As he continued reading he cited education as the single most important asset here in Milford.

Dr. Feser thanked the board for the opportunity to come and speak regarding the proposed budget. She stated she was mindful of the fact that she had no hand in the creation of this budget, but that she was here tonight fully able to support what has been prepared by the Board of Education. Dr. Feser stated it was imperative the Board understand the 3.8% increase. She continued with a PowerPoint presentation (supported by handout to the Board). Dr. Feser implored the Board to support the proposed budget. She stated it protects the integrity of classes and sustains existing academic programs. She further stated it enables good working going on in the school system and keeps pace with State and National curriculum. Dr. Feser stated the budget presented maintains building integrity and honors the city's fiscal challenges. She stated it was important to develop our children's future which helps shape Milford's future. Dr. Feser stated they would be happy to answer any questions the Board may have.

Chairman G. Smith thanked Dr. Feser. He stated he had a number of questions. He stated his first question references the Board of Finance minutes and an e-mail blast sent from administration regarding the budget, but since he did not receive this e-mail he was confused as to what was actually contained in the message, but that it was a misleading statement. He asked what type of communications the district and Board of Education use.

Mr. Cummings stated he sends e-mail blasts to the community and staff once a month.

Chairman G. Smith requested a copy of the e-blasts for the last 12 months. He stated there seems to be confusion that this Board has cut funding when in fact the Board of Education has received a \$1,200,000 increase. He stated he wished to remind everyone that this Board represents all the taxpayers of Milford. He also stated he has received a number of phone calls from concerned residents. Chairman G. Smith stated his question concerned enrollment. He stated enrollment is declining and is down about 316 students in the last two years and based on his quick math that is about 16 classrooms of students. He asked how long enrollment has been declining.

Mr. Cummings responded since 2000 where there were 7,700 students.

Ald. Blake asked about consequences mentioned in the presentation, specifically the ARRA money which was not put back in. He asked about class size and how it would be impacted and also asked about the strings program and if it would be affected.

Dr. Feser stated the ARRA covered 46 positions. She stated if the monies are not restored that would be the number of positions they are talking about.

Mr. Cummings stated the contract dictates class size. He stated for grades K-1 is it 25 and grade 2 and up, it is 30 students. He stated they anticipate a reduction of 6 classrooms across the district. He reiterated they can't go higher because of contract. He stated other areas that could be impacted would be electives, business classes, arts, Tech-Ed, which could be reduced. He also spoke regarding employees at the high school level.

Chairman G. Smith stated to Mr. Cummings that with a declining enrollment it was difficult to understand his theory that class size will increase.

Mr. Cummings stated elementary enrollment is declining, but high school and middle school enrollment is consistent.

Chairman G. Smith stated it was his understanding there was a \$2,000,000 savings from closing a school and from ARRA monies. He stated what he is hearing is that class sizes are increasing while enrollment is declining.

Mr. Cummings stated their projections are based on kindergarten registration, which typically happens in March.

Chairman G. Smith asked the last time they did not have a reduction.

Mr. Cummings replied he would have to research that and get the information to the Board.

Dr. Stapleton reminded the Board even with a loss of 140 kids that is across 10 schools and would have a small impact.

Dr. Feser added that 38 positions were captured with the closing of Simon Lake School and with the reconfiguration.

Ald. Staneski thanked administration for being here tonight and applauded the work of Mr. Cummings. She commented a prepared budget is to meet the needs of the school system. She stated they look at the dollar amount and the number of kids enrolled in the school system, but that it is not necessarily a number divided by the number of enrolled students. She stated she would caution this Board and stated it is not a per student cost. She asked for a list of unfunded mandates and also commented it was imperative there be no further cuts. With regard to ECS funds, she stated it was her understanding there has been no final vote to date. She asked if those dollars are restored if the Board of Education was saying they would supplant the ARRA money.

Dr. Feser responded yes.

Mr. Russell added the \$1.5 million is money that was reduced by the ECS grant to the State of Connecticut. He stated there is still \$1.9 in lost grants.

Ald. Staneski stated her question is on the unfunded mandates.

Ald. Vitali spoke to the discussion tonight of enrollment. He stated the reality is that kindergarten enrollment never really ends. He asked what the enrollment is right now.

Mr. Cummings responded it is around 400. He explained they need to let the teachers know by June 1. He stated if the number remains at 400 they would not assign staff where it is not needed. He stated they generally estimate September 15 as the last day, although this past year after Labor Day they had a number of enrollments.

Ald. Vitali asked what a realistic number would be from June through Labor Day.

Mr. Cummings stated over the course of the summer they get 15-20 enrollments and in the first week of September generally around 6-7 students. He stated the problem is with the ratio and where the kids fall.

Ald. Bevan questioned the numbers. He stated the stimulus money is \$1.9 million, but \$4.1 million was what was reported to the Board of Finance and the presentation tonight showed a different number.

Mr. Russell stated the confusion seems to be the ARRA funds for Title I and IDFB. He stated they are looking to replace existing positions that were lost for salaries.

Ald. Bevan commented as he reviewed the budget there were many changes from department to department and that he questioned those dollars.

Mr. Cummings explained administration/building administration act independently and advocate for their building facilities. There are some staffing requests but primarily building/facility grants. He stated they are asked to advocate on behalf of their own buildings/kids. Mr. Cummings stated they try to present a budget as close to zero as possible without impacting the education of the children. He stated their job is to advocate for the kids and that they need the administrators to document what they are required.

Chairman G. Smith stated they have lost 5% of the student body and expect to lose another 1,000 over the next few years. He stated over 60% of what taxpayers pay in taxes is education and 40% of the budget is fire, police and public works. He stated they received testimony from the police chief that police calls have increased. He also commented there are a lot more roads that need to be taken care of and those budgets have not increased. He stated those budgets have actually been cut. Chairman Smith added he realized the education department's budget is impacted by federal and local governments, but there are city departments that have received substantial cuts such as the fire department which lost two firefighters, police department that will be operating with less money and public works that will be operating with less money and positions as well. He stated with the exception of the Board of Education receiving \$1,200,000 over last year's \$2,000,000 increase, it is hard to explain to the taxpayers he receives calls from why education continues to receive increases.

Ald. Blake commented student achievement identifies the success of our Milford students. He also spoke as to the goals they wish to accomplish.

Mr. Cummings addressed the number of successes. He stated CMT performance is up and our kids are meeting or exceeding goal at the middle school levels. He stated the number of students taking AP classes is increasing and the graduation rate continues to improve each year. He stated they are on pace to achieve 100% per NCLB. He stated they are also continuing their efforts to bring Spanish to the middle school and they continue with SRBI mandates.

Ald. Blake commented the goals for next year are achievable.

Dr. Feser stated they are in the process of meeting with all building administrators and they will develop a school improvement plan with specific goals, i.e. CMT's, CAPT, etc. She explained annually they need to set district goals and meet and/or exceed them and added they will be as transparent as possible with their goals.

Ald. Goodrich referred to p. X of the Board of Education budget book, Public/Non-Public Tuition is \$1,600,000 and pointed out programs such as ECA, Trumbull Vo Ag and Science programs are not included.

Ms. Kelleher stated the numbers represent identified special education students. She stated if they don't meet their needs in district they go outside district. She stated the district prides themselves in meeting the needs of our students, but there are times they need to place outside.

Ald. Goodrich referred to p. 74 of the budget book and questioned the 19 students.

Ms. Kelleher stated that is out of district for those students who are transported. She is also pointed out residential placement by DCF which is not reflected in transportation costs.

Ald. Goodrich referred to p. 81 Mileage and questioned where everyone is going. He also asked about mileage reimbursement at .51.

Mr. Russell explained they have personnel who travel between schools. He stated the number is divided by 181 days of school.

Chairman G. Smith referenced the circumference of the earth is smaller than the amount of miles traveled by Board of Education personnel.

Mr. Cummings stated the number also reflects out of town conferences, which is in their contract. He also stated it is audited each July.

Ald. Goodrich asked about enrollment numbers at The Academy. He stated last year it was 73 and this year it is 49. He stated the significant reduction in student, but the same number of staff and asked why.

Mr. Cummings stated the population at the Academy tends to blossom after the first marking period. He stated as of this date the population is actually 80.

Ald. German thanked the administration for their hard work. He asked if there are layoffs, how it would work, if it is "last in, first out".

Mr. Cummings explained they are bound by State statute. He stated the last hired are the first let go. He went on to explain it does depend on certifications and the amount of time.

Ald. P. Smith asked about test scores and if administration could address where Milford ranks.

Mr. Cummings stated there are 24 towns in their reference group.

Ald. P. Smith asked where Milford ranks.

Mr. Cummings responded at the elementary school level in the bottom one-third and in middle school in the middle of the group. He stated at the high school level, Milford is in DRG D and one of the largest schools with special education students and the second highest with second language students. He stated this certainly is not an excuse by a challenge. He stated they have made great strides and will continue to do so. He stated he would be happy to provide the Board with a report.

Chairman G. Smith asked how it is decided what DRG a school is in.

Mr. Cummings explained the State uses a formula; however, they have since discontinued using it. He stated it is primarily derived from income.

Mr. Russell stated they went from 7,306 students to 6,984, which represents a drop of 322 students equaling a 4.6% ratio. He stated at the same time they estimated a loss of 57 staff.

Ald. Blake asked how the special education population has changed during the same time.

Ms. Kelleher stated in 2003 they had 1,040 students and currently they have 886. He stated it is worthy to note the type of disability has changed as well. She stated they have more students with multiple disabilities and more students with autism.

Ald. Goodrich referred to p. 22 Coaches/Athletics and asked for further explanation as to the increase.

Mr. Cummings stated they would like to add indoor track, unified sports and for safety concerns an assistant cheerleading coach and a band assistant. He stated these would be 12 month positions. He also stated they would like to bring back a drama program. He stated lacrosse is not shown because the parents have pledged to pay for it for two years.

Chairman G. Smith stated this Board does not micro manage the Board of Education budget. He asked about the new position for Energy Consultant. He asked for more information as to the position and the salary for this position.

Mr. Russell stated this is because of the energy savings they have recognized just in electricity alone. He explained they were approached a company representative sometime ago. He stated they represent 1,200 other school districts across the country. Mr. Russell explained the company's promise to reduce energy consumption and if the district does not recognize a savings the company would pay that position. He stated basically they guarantee no loss. He stated the company has worked on everything from compressors to freezers, laptops, etc. He stated the program began about a month ago.

Ald. Bevan asked if the lacrosse and indoor track programs would be for both boys and girls.

Mr. Cummings stated it would depend on student interest. He stated lacrosse parents feel they have enough students for both. Mr. Cummings stated because of Title 9, it is important to have both. He stated with regard to indoor track, it is likely it will be co-ed, adding it is a great off-season sport. He stated he believed the program was long overdue. He stated costs would be for transportation and coaches.

Ald. Bevan stated to his knowledge Milford does not have an indoor track and asked if they would be looking to building one down the road.

Mr. Cummings stated they would likely utilize the gym facilities as well as run in the hallways. He stated meets would generally be held on Saturdays.

Ald. Bevan asked about use of the fields once the school year ends.

Mr. Cummings responded he feels the schools belong to the city.

Ald. Bevan asked about the athletic director positions. He stated he has been asked about their pay, if they receive a full teacher's salary and athletic director pay as well.

Mr. Cummings explained they work two of five periods and also receive a stipend as athletic director. He stated they work roughly 11 months of the year.

Ald. Bevan thanked administration for coming tonight and answering questions.

Chairman G. Smith asked where the two recently added sports were found.

Mr. Cummings stated they were in the proposed budget before the Board of Aldermen.

Ald. Staneski referred to p. 4 of the budget book and asked if the arbitration settlement was built in.

Mr. Cummings responded yes.

Ald. Staneski asked if the Board of Education ever gives money back to the City. She stated if a city department has money left over it goes back to the general fund. She referenced the \$600,000 savings that has been recognized and asked where those monies were put or if it is just a paper savings.

Mr. Russell stated they approached the Board of Education a few years ago about energy conservation and putting monies into energy conservation to further give the district savings. He also explained grants they have received to match those savings. He stated they would like to continue to put those into the energy accounts, i.e. natural gas and oil.

Ald Vitali asked about the energy position and if it would ever be gone.

Mr. Russell stated the contract is for four years and at that point it would be up to the district and the company if they keep the position.

Ald. Vitali asked if there would be a point of no return.

Mr. Russell stated they feel it is a worthwhile position. He cited as an example, if a concert were held and the air conditioning were turned on, the person would make sure it was off at the conclusion.

Ald. Vitali asked about training processes for custodians, teachers and other staff. He stated it would seem training would lessen the obligation. He also asked if the energy company was handling health insurance.

Mr. Russell stated all expenses related to the person are covered by the company.

Ald. Vitali stated it was his understanding the energy position is a non-representative position. He asked if the person would therefore negotiate with the company directly.

Mr. Russell responded yes. He stated the person would have to negotiate their own salary.

Ald. Vitali asked about severance with sick days.

Mr. Russell responded there is none.

Ald. Vitali stated the position pays \$74,000, plus perks, i.e. travel, etc.

Mr. Russell responded yes.

Ald. Vitali asked what the hockey program costs per year.

Mr. Russell responded \$15,000, plus coaches at about \$6,000.

Ald. Vitali commented the Board of Education needs to consider that it will end up taking over the lacrosse program as it did with the hockey program. He expressed concern that the Board of Education is cutting teachers and programs, but adding lacrosse, track and an energy position. He also commented regarding not knowing how many teachers were actually hired back. He congratulated administration on their hard work improving education.

Ald. Veccharelli stated last year Simon Lake was closed and 38 positions were lost and now we are looking at 47 positions this year. He stated he was hoping the administration could guarantee they will not close another school. He asked what other positions besides teachers were lost. He also spoke about the Federal monies that came this way and that we all knew the day would come when that money would be gone.

Mr. Cummings stated they would not be closing a school this year. We will need to make some thoughtful decisions in the next few years. He also pointed out 90% of the budget is staffing. He also stated 2/3 of staff costs are due to certified staff and their non-certified staff. He also stated there are 175 paraprofessionals. He stated they have already cut secretaries and one more custodian could be cut as well. He stated they are not filling open maintenance positions.

Ald. Veccharelli stated when Simon Lake was closed last year there were more kids and less teachers. He stated if they want to have the system they have today they need to pay those monies they are losing. He stated there is a lot to take into consideration here. Ald. Veccharelli stated he has concerns where they are at and that he does not want to shortchange the kids. He also stated he is trying to be realistic with regard to dollars and that the community has a lot to do with the school system. Ald. Veccharelli stated this Board also needed to look at fire, police, public works and recreation. He stated he did not want to hurt the education system and that he wanted to have the type of education system that makes people happy they live here.

Chairman G. Smith stated he understood Ald. Veccharelli's concern with the closing of another school. He also stated there have been discussions about having a meeting of the two Boards, however due to a recent judgment from CCM they need to be concerned with having a quorum and thereby that being considered a meeting. He stated this Board cannot and should not micro manage the Board of Education. He also stated he finds it offensive when someone says this Board doesn't care about kids when we don't give \$4,000,000, but only give \$2,000,000. If questioned if this Board had given \$2,000,000 more last year would it have kept Simon Lake open longer than one year.

Mr. Cummings stated they have demonstrated their commitment to the financial needs of Milford and the needs of our kids. It could very well be on the table and we would be looking at reconfiguration. You are correct; it was the Board of Education, not the Board of Aldermen that voted to close Simon Lake. Mr. Cummings stated he felt the closing of Simon Lake and the reconfiguration of the elementary schools was in the long run in the best interest of our kids.

Chairman G. Smith addressed the e-blasts and how the Board of Education communicates with staff members and PTA. He stated he would be surprised if anyone up here did not want to be copied on those e-blasts.

Ald. Goodrich commented about Trumbul Vo Ag. He stated he was in favor of that program and expressed his hope the Board of Education would be able to save that program and the ECA program.

Ald. Staneski stated she does receive the e-blasts, probably because she is a parent, but pointed out they are available on the website. She asked how actual people would be lost.

Mr. Cummings responded around 25 people. He stated they initially laid off 24, but 5 came back.

Ald. Staneski asked about class size. She asked if the funding is not restored and funding remains at the Board of Finance recommendation, how would class size be impacted.

Mr. Cummings stated they would work in the self-contained classrooms. He stated they have a State mandate, but an ethical mandate as well. He stated they would work to maintain lower student teacher ratio. Mr. Cumming also stated he wanted the Board to be aware that in Milford only 4% of its students are out placed compared to numerous other towns such as Stratford, Hamden, Shelton, etc.).

Chairman G. Smith pointed out the City side of the budget received actual cuts such as police officers, two firefighters, a dispatcher, public works positions, a recreation supervisor and more. He stated there are many forms of caring for kids. He also pointed out there are 134 foreclosures pending in Milford. He stated it was the responsibility of this Board to protect all services that benefit children in Milford and certainly first and foremost, education, but having a dispatcher available to answer a 911 call is important.

Ald. Staneski spoke as to unfunded mandates and stated they needed to be cognizant of these unfunded mandates.

Mr. Russell stated a recent unfunded mandate is the RTI, which is a large number. He stated he would get those numbers to her.

Ald. Staneski asked the basic aid ratio.

Mr. Russell replied 9%.

Chairman G. Smith stated a question that was asked last year, is what number of people-people hours do the Milford School System spending on managing unfunded mandates.

Mr. Cummings stated there is a lot of work by the secretarial staff as well as administration. He also referred to PA 10-111 School Reform.

Chairman G. Smith stated each year the taxpayers are being asked to make up that difference. He stated the for the record that the Board of Finance recommended a \$1.2 million dollar increase over last year's budget and that last year the Board of Education recommended \$2.1 million dollar increase.

Dr. Stapleton stated there are numerous inequities on the City side of the budget vs. the Board of Education side of the budget. He stated the Board of Education has received two times the number of layoffs the city side has received and that the reductions the Board of Education is receiving this year is significantly less than what the city is facing. He stated a 6% increase may seem like a lot, but it is a far cry from other towns. Dr. Stapleton stated education is expensive and it does go up each year, but it is the same for business and our families alike. He stated he is very proud of the Milford School System and that reflects on all.

Ald. Blake commented the Mayor's proposed budget has never been lower than 5%.

Ald. Vitali raised a point of order stating the dialogue was getting off subject.

Chairman G. Smith thanked Dr. Feser, Mr. Cummings, Mr. Russell Dr. Stapleton for coming tonight.

Ald. Vitali and Ald. Vetro made and seconded a motion to recess at 9:42 p.m. Motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen K. Huber
Recording Secretary