

Milford Board of Education Committee of the Whole Meeting April 26, 2010

Board members present:

David Amendola
Tracy Casey
Suzanne DiBiase
Diane Kruger-Carroll
Greg Oliver
Jay Tranquilli
Mark Stapleton
Robert White

Board members absent:

Jack O'Connell
Josip Jukic

Administration present:

Michael Cummings
Philip Russell

I. CALL TO ORDER

The Milford Board of Education held a Committee of the Whole meeting on Monday, April 26, 2010, in the Media Center at Jonathan Law High School. Chairman Stapleton called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. with the reciting of the Pledge of Allegiance immediately following.

Chairman Stapleton read the following prepared statement:

"I would like to make a couple of brief comments before we get started. First, we would like to thank everyone for taking the time to come to the meeting. It is important to be engaged and to hear firsthand what some of the proposals are and what the thinking and rationale is behind them. Second, please keep in mind that these proposals are based on the Board of Finance approved budget. The budget decisions the Board of Alderman make could dramatically alter the possibilities.

We have come to the point of considering such significant changes for a variety of reasons. Clearly the current economic climate is one reason. Last years reductions, this years anticipated reductions and the stark reality of minimal increases in the coming years are demanding that we consider a different approach to improving the Milford Public School system. We simply cannot afford to continue the familiar practice of raiding that sliver of the budget pie that includes supplies, computers, furniture, books and maintenance accounts.

The potential changes you will hear about tonight have come about only after a great deal of arduous, careful, thorough and rigorous consideration of many, many options. Everything has been on the table.

We know that some of these changes will be sad and difficult to absorb. They differ from what we know, what we are familiar with but they are not new or unique to Milford. Many districts are going through layoffs, school closings and re-alignments. In the past 20 years, Milford has twice previously gone through school closings and re-alignments. In fact, some districts have even re-aligned the elementary schools based solely on the benefits to the curriculum and educational programs.

Lastly, let me just say that our children are remarkably resilient and adaptable to change. It is us, the adults who seem to struggle most with new and different routines and ideas. Tonight, I would ask simply, that you keep an open mind, consider the proposals in a balanced way and give yourself enough time to gain a responsible perspective on the ideas. Thank you again for coming out tonight".

II. PRESENTATION:

Mr. Cummings delivered a PowerPoint presentation (attached). He began his presentation by giving a history of the 2010 budget request. He told the board that he still stands behind the original budget request, which requires a 4.97% increase over last year's budget amount. The request is what administration believes to be a fair one and reflects what the school system needs. He further

Approved

said that the budget cuts of last year hurt the district by not making needed purchases, improvements to infrastructure did not go forward, and some needs were ignored.

Mr. Cummings explained that in March, the Board of Finance reviewed the budget submission and recommended a cut of \$2.2 million from the proposed request. The Board of Aldermen will now need to vote on the budget. However, the budget may not be approved until late June. In the event the money is not restored, administration has been working on several scenarios to accommodate a cut of this magnitude.

He told the board in developing the scenarios he used three “essential questions.” These same questions were used from the middle school reorganization. The three questions used were:

- Will the scenario accommodate enrollment?
- Is the scenario financially sound?
- Does this scenario improve the educational program?

Four scenarios were presented. They were:

1. Cost cutting ideas submitted from Milford Public Schools employees – Employees were surveyed for suggestions. 193 ideas were submitted. While a lot of the ideas will be considered, they did not meet the essential questions.
2. Increase classroom sizes to contract maximums – 25 students in K-1, 30 in grades 2-12 are the contract maximums. This plan was especially difficult due to the boundaries of where children live. Other negatives included: no room for classroom growth, teachers would be more isolated and disparity among schools. In the end, this plan did not meet any of the essential questions.
3. Close a school and keep K-5 structure – This plan would only save \$580,000 of the 2.2M needed. It also creates inequity in the schools. It would cause redistricting across the City.
4. Close a school and go to a K-2/3-5 structure – This plan meets the essential questions. It is explained below.
 - The closure of Simon Lake School
 - The realignment of the remaining 8 elementary schools into four K-2 and four 3-5 buildings.
 - Each K-2 building will be paired with one 3-5 building, (familiarily called ‘sister schools’). For example, all of the children who lived in either the JFK, Simon Lake, or Pumpkin Delight areas and are entering kindergarten, 1st, or 2nd grade will attend JFK for grades K-2. When the children are ready to enter 3rd grade, they will all go – as a group – to Pumpkin Delight for their Grade 3-5 education. The pairings are as follows:
 - K-2: JFK 3-5: Pumpkin Delight
 - K-2: Mathewson 3-5: Meadowside
 - K-2: Orange Ave 3-5: Calf Pen Meadow
 - K-2: Live Oaks 3-5: Orchard Hills

The entire pre-school program would be housed within Orange Avenue School.

The consolidation of elementary services into K-2 and 3-5 buildings will allow staff to better meet the learning needs of all students. The students can be grouped by needs. Buildings will be provided better resources to meet the demands of SRBI and the district can now target professional development better.

Approved

Of the plans provided, this plan provides substantial financial savings, leaves class sizes in an acceptable range and most importantly, improves the quality of education delivered throughout the district.

There would however, be a reduction of 29 teachers, 8 paraprofessionals, 3 custodians, 2 secretaries, a building principal, and several other full and part time positions using this scenario.

From some of the “Plan 1” Employees Suggestions, the district would save \$610,000 in curriculum programs and operational budget items.

The net total savings resulting from the above plan is \$2,209,025. It is also important to note that this plan could potentially save the city over \$350,000 in staffing and benefits costs.

Chairman Stapleton thanked Mr. Cummings for the well thought out presentation. He then told the public the presentation was based on the current 2.2M decrease made by the Board of Finance. The budget is still in the deliberation stage and could be decreased or increased. He urged the public to speak to their aldermen. Further cuts would be very difficult to absorb. He then asked Mr. Cummings to give an example of what further cuts would mean to the school system.

Mr. Cummings told the board further cuts could mean many things. Administration may have to cut more high school positions. Some other ideas are: closing elementary buildings at 6:00 – negative impact on the City. Program cuts – athletics (freshmen), buildings and facilities, furniture and textbooks. One percent equates to \$800,000.

Mrs. Casey asked Mr. Cummings what percentage of kids would be impacted that would be going to different schools? Mr. Cummings told her he did not know. However, everyone would be affected at some point.

Mrs. Casey asked what percentage would be bused. Mr. Cummings told her that eight buses would need to be added.

Mrs. Casey told Mr. Cummings the presentation was very thorough. She then asked Mr. Cummings if the district was not in the current financial position, would he still recommend the plan.

Mr. Cummings told her that if the plan was not implemented this year, it would be at some point. If the plan is not implemented next year, the district would be doing it in a couple years.

Mr. White asked for the total number staff cuts? Mr. Cummings said 23 elementary, six middle, five central office, two high schools, two support teachers, some paraprofessional support, one secretary and some custodial positions would be cut.

III. PUBLIC COMMENT

Chairman Stapleton read the public comment statement.

Arlene Elmo - 74 Indian River Road – She is a teacher in Milford. The City pays health insurance to AON. She recommended the Board of Education to seek restitution of AON funds given back to the City due to a scam. Milford received \$28 million from AON. The City continues to use AON even after the company was identified in the scam. She urged everyone to contact the Mayor and others to get the insurance out to bid. She also urged the board to ask the parties that fall under the professional accounts to take a 20% pay cut. She also asked that the FICA amounts be reduced saving the district over \$100,000.

Joe DellaMonica Sr. – 60 Berner Terrace – Mr. DellaMonica thanked Mr. Cummings for his presentation. He told the board the problem is Milford is getting shafted by the State. According to the State, Milford is considered wealthy. The Educational Cost Sharing (ECS) formula has to be rewritten by the senators. He urged the public to go to Hartford and speak out on this topic.

Laurie Androne - 11 Turner Avenue – She asked if Simon Lake would become part of the Boys and Girls Club. She referred to a slide in the PowerPoint.

Chairman Stapleton told the public that Public Comment does not permit two way dialogue. However, every question would be answered on the website.

Approved

Linda DellaMonica – Read a prepared statement for her husband. Why are you making rash decisions? How does a family with four or five children, all going to different bus stops manage? Why does this need to be done this way. Why don't you just increase class size. Why not ask the people of the City of Milford what they think of such a radical change. Why not put this on the ballot at the upcoming election.

Peter Carlson – 11 Nells Road - He currently has two children in the school system. He is an educator in the town of Stratford. The closing of any school will negatively impact his children to an equitable education. The Connecticut Supreme Court ruled March 22 2010 that students have the explicit right to receive a superb level of education. He demands the City's politicians regain the same, if not a better education. Education means economic growth.

Cathy Owens - 245 Deer Point Road – With the proposed changes, one child would go to JFK and one would go to Pumpkin Delight. How will the afterschool programs be handled?

Chairman Stapleton reminded the public that questions will be answered on the website at a later time.

Christopher Thomas – Argyle Road – Mr. Thomas believes this is being done too fast. He is an educator in another district. He said most towns let the public participate in the process if the town is going to go through major changes. He further stated that Mr. Cummings should not be making the decision. The board should form a task force and seek input from the teachers, administrators and parents. He would like to hear all ten board members comments on the record. If you make fundamental changes without the public, you will get resistance.

Laura Katz – 294 W. Main Street – She is a school social worker in another district. She has two children, an incoming kindergartener and one going into fourth grade. As a parent, this is very upsetting. Her daughter is a nervous incoming kindergartner and her son really likes his friends and teachers at Meadowside. She likes the plan. However, how will the district plan for the transitions? Will there be open houses? Also, how will the PTAs work together? Who will coordinate getting together over the summer? How is it going to go forward in this short amount of time?

Gretchen DiStefano – What will the start times be? Will the middle schools be redistricted?

Kathy Holmberg – 108 Berner Terrace – What is the cost of plan four? She feels the kids will be shuffled along. What about the student that it takes a year to feel comfortable in one place only to be shuffled off to the next school? Does not think it is in the best interest of the kids. It is too much change in a short amount of time.

Carrie Gribaldi – 121 Maple Street – She has two kids at Orange Avenue. What the public did not hear about was FAMILY. By splitting children between two schools, splits the amount of participation in the PTAs or anything else. How can you support both when the children are in two separate schools? If a family has two working parents, this will be an added burden on them. This will create complete havoc on families. Please come up with a plan that puts the least amount of stress on the families of Milford.

Tim Chaucer – 104 Hawley Avenue – What happened to neighborhood schools? Plan four disrupts that concept and this is only the beginning. Property values are tied to the schools. The highly respected neighborhoods property values would be affected. This plan came out of nowhere. 2.5 million is not a lot of money. He feels there is no reason to change the long traditional neighborhood school system. Furthermore, there is not a permanent superintendent. What an odd time to change the school system.

Jennifer Federico – 14 Breakneck Lane – She has a 3rd grader at Meadowside and a 1 year old, who wants to do everything his sibling wants to do. Several years ago, some Meadowside families were redistricted to West Shore to accommodate the overcrowded Harborside. The fact that this plan is being brought out now and school begins only three months away can only mean this is a done deal. She has the fear that this plan will be forced through the board. People are assuming this is a done deal. The wheels are already in motion. This is more backroom politics of one party rule in Milford. It is because the few in power don't want to listen to the public. The slogan for the city should read "A small City with a cold heart."

175 Meadowside Road – She has two children at Meadowside Elementary. You will be splitting up kids. She said she has so many questions. There is not a lot of time to implement the plan. Has administration really had enough time to plan something this big out? Why would you not wait until the Board of Aldermen vote? How will activities work? Bigger class sizes?? PTAs? Parents schedules?? She concluded by asking the board if this plan will stop the up and down cycle.

Approved

Nathan Blair – He said it is not unreasonable to ask when the public will be given answers.

1. How many teachers would the district be losing?
2. What is class size after the 14 additional teacher reductions?
3. The City received 28 million \$ refunded from the government. Is the Board of Education fighting for some of the money?
4. The budget for teachers last year was 60M. It is 62.3M this year. What is the difference?

Rocco Frank – Chairman of the Independent party. He thanked Mr. Cummings for the presentation. The board needs to adopt a long term plan so the board does not have to do this every year. He asked the board what the plan is for the future. The board needs to have an educational system that is properly balanced with what the Grand List delivers.

Mike Taylor – 340 W. Harbor Road – He is very impressed with the plan. He said that his daughter was redistricted to Pumpkin and will be redistricted again. He hopes administration has done the planning work and this will be handled the same way the Pumpkin kindergarten was handled.

Student – 20 Joanne Drive – He is a student at Simon Lake. He is concerned that if he moves to a new school, he won't have any friends. He asked the board why he has to move to another school.

Bridget Zappalia – 34 Oak Ridge Lane – She has a student at Pumpkin (K) and one at Mathewson. Many times she is unable to attend events because the calendars conflict at the schools. Many times she cannot contribute to a fundraiser because she already did. Some families will have four children in different schools. PTAs are supposed to have their budgets in place soon. She feels the decision has been made and the board needs to let the public know. Seven years ago, an enumeration study was done. The recommendation was not to redistrict. The public does not want to keep being reshuffled.

Ray Vitali – 48 Founders Way – He does not envy the board. He thinks there are other ways to handle the budget. He warned the board to wait until the new superintendent is seated before making significant changes. If the school needs to be closed, then do it and provide those students adequate resources. He recommended the board use the next year to form committees and get input from all. He feels the superintendent should be part of the process. Personally, he would like to see a K-8 structure.

Manny Deluca – Laurel Avenue – He said his neighbor's house burned down. His child will have no school to go to. How much time does the board need to implement cost savings ideas? The field at Simon Lake is not used. What if enrollment goes down? Has anyone talked to the Mayor about the field? His daughter held a sign stating "I love Simon Lake." He encouraged the board to take the time needed before implementing such a major plan.

Tracy Berry – Meadowside Road – She is a West Shore graduate. She found it rough transitioning. Her son currently attends Simon Lake as an "out of district" student. He would go to Meadowside for one year only to transition to West Shore. He is special needs and has a difficult time with transition. Some children have never ridden on a bus. She does not feel that the children are the priority. The school community works together transporting children to and from school. How will this work now? She urged administration to cut their salaries.

Rich Ernest - 25 Birch Avenue – He moved to Milford about 10 years ago. The schools played a big role in his decision. His children spoke. Each telling the board they want to stay with their friends. They are afraid they won't meet any new friends. How does this help academics? Mr. Ernest concluded by stating that teachers will not want to come to Milford.

Name unknown - McDermott Street – She is the parent of four children. How will she transport her children? How do you get parent support? The change looks good on paper, but how will the PTAs work? Also, when you move kids away from their comfort zone, they get upset.

Sarah ? – She is a student. She is not supportive of the new plan. Children are not happy when you take them out of their comfort zone.

Kathy Olson – 55 Carla Drive – She is an Orchard Hills parent. She is upset that there is no Plan 5 K-8. She is very active in the Orchard Hills PTA. How will the PTA programs work? When you separate that out, the whole community is gone. She supports K-8.

Approved

Steven Ziegler – Roses Mill Road – Taxpayers have to vote on the budget in other towns. He has spoke out at BOA meetings. He does not think the aldermen do anything. He asked the public to vote them out on Election Day. His son's teacher will lose her job because of the cuts.

Name unknown - 50 Green Street – She is a student at Meadowside. She has two brothers that will be separated. She likes the idea of making new friends. She asked the board not to eliminate the enrichment program. The program has great teachers.

Mark McGeehan – 58 Beaverbrook Road – He has three children at JFK. Research has shown that children in his area do not transition well. Before the plan, his son was to transition once. He will now transition twice. Afraid his son will be lost in the shuffle. He also questioned the transportation costs in plan 3.

Joanne Hoffenberger – President of Meadowside PTA and the mother of four children. She agrees with Chris Thomas. She urged the board to take the time needed to do the right thing for the children of the City.

Stacy ? – Pamela Drive – She asked why there is not a K-8 plan? Her daughter transitioned from Live Oaks to middle school this year. She asks her mom all of the time why she couldn't stay with Ms. Lacobelle.

Alexandra Wargo – 16 Marsh Street – His kids went to St. Ann's. They are now going to Simon Lake. You can't keep shuffling kids around.

Joe Prisco – He can't hear anyone at the Parsons building. But he heard everyone at Law.

Susan Carroll-Dwyer – 771 Milford Point Road – She likes the neighborhood school system. She registered her daughter at Pumpkin Delight. The proposal would send her daughter to JFK. She does not want her daughter on the bus for .30 minutes. Would like the board to consider K-8.

Leslie May – Oriole Lane – Does not support shuffling children around. Middle school should be called "third school."

Unknown name – 15 Spruce Street – Consider no action for another year. Kids learn from each other. She supports a neighborhood school.

Clarrisa Bellamy – 49 Sunnyside CT – She is a parent of a 3rd grader at Orange Avenue. She likes the proposal. However, she is concerned about the logistics. She also said the PTAs have money in them. What will happen to unused funds? She asked the board to spend more time before implementing the plan.

Laurie Ross – 64 Hillside Avenue. – She has a child at Orchard Hills. The drama club, grades kindergarten through fifth grade would spend one day a week together preparing for the production. The younger children learned from the older ones. It was a wonderful experience for all.

Bruno – Anchorage Drive – She wants the district to do the right thing financially, as well as educationally. The plan should be one that solves the problem. She encouraged the board to take the time needed to implement the right plan.

Jaimie McCarvill – Birch Place – The sad thing is it all comes down to money. She asked how can parents help get the money needed from the State. She applauded Mr. Cummings for the presentation presented. She believes the sister schools theory could work. However, she is a proponent of the K-8 structure.

Cathy Berni – She believes the K-2/3-5 plan is excellent. She only wished the parent community had showed up at the Board of Finance meeting; who knows what could have happened. She hopes the public will be attending the Board of Aldermen meeting on Wednesday.

Brenda Brannigan – She is a JFK parent. She would like to know what happens to the money left in the PTO's.

V. BOARD COMMENT

Chairman Stapleton thanked Mr. Cummings for the presentation.

Approved

Mrs. Casey told the public that the board had not been informed of the various plans prior to the meeting. She thanked Mr. Cummings. It is obvious, a change needs to happen. She challenged the Board of Aldermen to work with the Board of Education to come together and work as a community.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. White made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Amendola seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 10:20 p.m.

Robert White
Corresponding Secretary

Pam Griffin
Recording Secretary