

**BOARD OF FINANCE
BUDGET DELIBERATIONS - FY 2014/2015
PRESENTATION OF BOARD OF EDUCATION'S PROPOSED BUDGET
FEBRUARY 20, 2014**

The Milford Board of Finance held a budget deliberations session on Thursday, February 20, 2014 in Conference Room B of the Parsons Complex. Chairman Lema reconvened the meeting at 6:33 p.m. He stated they were here tonight regarding the education operating budget.

Board Members Present

Brian A Lema, Chairman
Scott Marlow
Mickel Montano
Joseph J. Fitzpatrick
Joseph Castignoli

Also Present

Mayor Benjamin G. Blake
Dr. Elizabeth Feser, Supt. of Schools
James Richetelli, Deputy Supt. of Operations
Michael Cummings, Asst. Supt. of Schools
Susan Glennon, Chairman (BOE)
Susan Kelleher, Director Pupil Personnel
Peter Erodici, Finance Director

Chairman Lema welcomed the Dr. Feser and staff and explained they could give a presentation if they so desired and then the Board would continue through the budget book.

Ms. Glennon, Chair of the Board of Education thanked the Board for the opportunity to address the education budget. She stated Dr. Feser's proposed budget was a 1.326% increase over last year. She stated the Board spent many hours examining the budget and were able to find reductions resulting in a .754% increase over last year's budget. She stated that is the lowest increase in over 10 years. Ms. Glennon stated a budget should reflect the need of the school children. She stated this budget does that while integrating the Common Core Standard (CCS), technology (SBAT), repair and maintenance of their equipment, etc. She stated she was happy to point out they have added two pre-school programs and a strings program. Reading from a prepared statement, Ms. Glennon spoke of the rigorous work ahead, but stated this budget would stay the course. She stated Dr. Feser, Mr. Richetelli and Mr. Cummings would address the major adjustments in the 2014-2015 budget vs. the 2013-2014 budget. She stated they would also address any additional questions from the Board.

Dr. Feser referred to the handout provided to the Board members continuing with an explanation of the major adjustments to the 2014/2014 proposed budget. She stated curriculum work is a priority.

Mr. Richetelli referred the Board members to the budget book, p. VII-X, which he stated showed the summary for the proposed 2014-2015 budget. He noted wage increases are a part of the budget. In addition, he stated the teachers will receive a 2% increase, however, with no step increase. He stated all of the other bargaining groups had varying degrees, but that was offset by a reduction in work staff (12 teachers and 2 secretaries). He also addressed transportation, the transportation contract and the transportation audit. Mr. Richetelli also pointed out professional development is slightly lower this year.

Mr. Castignoli asked about the decline in student population and what numbers they were looking at.

Mr. Richetelli responded it is about 55 students.

Mr. Marlow asked if they expected the downward trend to continue.

Dr. Feser stated yes, based on the information they are receiving. She pointed out the decline is not just Milford, but statewide. She stated the greatest decline is in the elementary school, but they are starting to see it more in the middle schools.

Chairman Lema asked if the staff reduction was through attrition or layoffs.

Mr. Richetelli stated they always hope it will be through attrition. He stated on an average they have up to 18 retirements each year.

Chairman Lema asked about transportation, with the first year being 5%. He asked about the following years.

Mr. Richetelli stated the second and third years would be 3%. He pointed out the Milford School District has the lowest transportation costs in the state.

Mr. Fitzpatrick asked if schools would be closed.

Ms. Glennon explained there is a Long Range Planning Committee in place that will come up with a report sometime in March. She stated she did not foresee any schools being closed next year.

Mr. Fitzpatrick asked if they would be going back to the K-5 format.

Ms. Glennon stated the Board of Education is committed to reducing transitions, but she was not sure what the Long Range Planning Committee would be recommending.

Mr. Fitzpatrick asked if the district would still maintain two high schools or move to one high school.

Ms. Glennon stated it is something that has been looked at and talked about, but she did not see it in the near future. She stated it was something that was discussed.

Mr. Marlow noted the special education account seemed much higher. He asked if they had identified students that may be placed out of district.

Dr. Feser stated the figure in the budget is students moving forward.

Ms. Kelleher explained as a district they have the lowest out of district placement. She stated they do their best to keep students here.

Mr. Marlow noted a lot of money is tied to the budget associated with the Common Core Standard (CCS). He asked Dr. Feser if she could provide the reader's digest version of the goal of CCS.

Dr. Feser stated it is important to understand the CCS is a set of standards, not a curriculum. She explained about 10 years ago it was decided there should be a common set of standards. She stated Connecticut has

signed on to support these standards, with 46 other states. She stated they continue to compare these standards to their own standards to see where they are.

Mr. Cummings added when they were looking at where other countries were and what they were doing it became clear the United States was falling further and further behind. He stated as part of the CCS, they have to train their staff which drives costs up. He stated where they were behind the most was with Math.

Mr. Marlow asked how often the standards are re-visited.

Dr. Feser stated it is a massive overall so you would not likely see it for another 20 years.

Mr. Marlow asked if student performance is tied to the CCS.

Dr. Feser replied yes, that it is a piece of it. She spoke of CAPT and CMT testing which have been phased out, with the option of school districts going to other options. She stated in Milford would be going with SBAC. She explained testing would be grades 3 and up with all of the testing done on the computer.

Mr. Marlow asked if teacher evaluations were tied in with this as well.

Dr. Feser responded yes. She explained it is a way of holding teachers accountable for the student's growth. She stated there is enormous pressure on classroom teachers as well as administrators.

Mr. Fitzpatrick asked if funding would be based on the results of testing down the road.

Mr. Cummings spoke to the Race to the Top grant.

Ms. Kelleher one of the grants from the federal government was cut this year and continues to be cut going forward.

Dr. Feser added the IDEA grant is a grant which many districts rely on.

Mr. Marlow asked about any savings in facilities and natural gas.

Mr. Richetelli explained less consumption is what drives the savings. He stated the energy savings program is based on changing behavior and culture.

Mr. Marlow asked if the energy specialist position was a permanent position.

Mr. Richetelli explained it is part of a four year contract they have with the company. He pointed out that contract expires next year, but that they have not had discussion as yet. He stated energy costs are decreasing each year since the inception of the program.

Chairman Lema asked about decreases in liability.

Mr. Richetelli commented it comes down to experience. He stated based on experience it was reduced about 3%.

Mr. Fitzpatrick asked if there is any funding support for SRO's.

Mr. Richetelli replied no.

Mr. Marlow asked about the greeters, noting there were some additional greeters in the budget.

Dr. Feser stated the three additional greeter positions that were requested were eliminated by the Board of Education.

Mr. Fitzpatrick asked if the SRO's were union or non-union.

Mr. Richetelli stated the SRO's are sworn officers, so yes they are part of the union.

Chairman Lema thanked Dr. Feser and her staff for their presentation and comments. He stated typically the Board goes through each account at this point.

1000 Series – Salaries

Mr. Marlow noted a small decrease in special education positions and asked for an update.

Mr. Richetelli stated that reflected a 1 ½ position due to the loss of grant funding.

Mr. Fitzpatrick asked about the elimination of the sign language teacher.

Ms. Kelleher stated the position is now found under Occupational/Physical Therapist.

Mr. Richetelli stated it is account 1129.

Mr. Fitzpatrick asked about account 1112 Homebound and the \$6,000 increase.

Ms. Kelleher explained that account is for those students who receive services outside of school due to serious illness or students who have been expelled or students just unable to attend school.

Mr. Fitzpatrick asked where those services are held.

Ms. Kelleher stated most is done at the Academy.

Mr. Castignoli asked how many students are in the program.

Ms. Kelleher stated there are approximately 22.

Mr. Fitzpatrick asked if those students were also listed under another school.

Ms. Kelleher explained they are included as part of their home school.

Mr. Fitzpatrick asked how many teachers.

Ms. Kelleher stated it depended on the number of students. She stated they have someone who oversees the program and also explained about the tutors that are hired.

Mr. Fitzpatrick asked if these students are typically high school students.

Ms. Kelleher stated it includes all students.

Mr. Castignoli asked how many are expelled student.

Ms. Kelleher stated she would have to check.

Mr. Castignoli asked how long a student can be expelled.

Ms. Kelleher responded up to 180 days.

Dr. Feser explained how a student can return to their home school and the stipulations.

Mr. Fitzpatrick asked if the salaries found on page 8 were negotiated salary position.

Mr. Richetelli replied yes, with the exception of the hourly aides and cafeteria aides.

Chairman Lema asked about salary negotiations.

Mr. Richetelli stated that is what they expect with salary negotiations, adding they are going into negotiations with several others as well.

2000 Series – Benefits

Mr. Castignoli asked about any increases in FICA.

Mr. Erodici stated he did not expect those to go up, adding very few people meet those requirements.

Mr. Richetelli stated he could provide details to the Board.

Mr. Castignoli asked about the details for Blue Cross/Blue Shield.

Mr. Richetelli explained he receives a number from their consultants and then plug it into the budget. He stated this account reflects active employees on the city side as well as retired employees 65 years or over.

3000 Series – Budget Detail

Chairman Lema referenced p. 13, and asked about account 3305 Security Services.

Mr. Erodicti stated he believed that account was for the SRO's. He stated they were not built into the 2014 budget. He stated this reflects when the SRO's were originally approved.

Mr. Castignoli asked for a breakdown on contracted services.

Mr. Richetelli stated he would get that.

Chairman Lema asked about account 3232 Professional Evaluations.

Ms. Kelleher stated the account is used for independent student evaluations done by consultants outside of the school district.

4000 Series – Facilities

Mr. Marlow asked about account 4102 – Water and Sewer (p. 17)

Mr. Richetelli stated it is based on usage and the recommendation of the water company.

Mr. Fitzpatrick asked about account 4104 – Energy Conservation Services (p. 17)

Mr. Richetelli reiterated this is the last year of the contract and that they were still reviewing options.

Chairman Lema asked about any upcoming major grounds projects.

Mr. Richetelli stated there was nothing at this point.

5000 – Transportation, Tuition and Other Support

Mr. Castignoli asked about account 5600 Tuition – Special Education and what grants they receive.

Mr. Richetelli explained they receive monies from the State.

Mr. Castignoli asked if the number of students was up.

Ms. Kelleher stated it is the cost of the tuition that is going up.

Mr. Fitzpatrick asked if there are 50 students.

Ms. Kelleher replied yes and explained the tuition rates. She also noted a student may have an additional paraprofessional.

6000 – Educational Supplies

Mr. Marlow asked if the district could foresee moving away from textbooks, especially with the amount of technology.

Mr. Cummings stated they are watching it very closely, adding there could be some pilot programs, but they were not ready for full implementation at this point.

7000 – Equipment

Mr. Castingoli asked about 7350 Computers and how many schools those monies represented.

Mr. Cummings explained the matching dollar amount they received from the State to help schools support their technology for the testing (SBAC). He stated it is for 200+ computers and 300 laptops. He also stated they are looking at Chrome Books which would help with the demand of the testing. He stated it would be implemented primarily at the elementary school level.

Mr. Castignoli asked if there is a matching amount.

Mr. Cummings stated \$254,000 was the grant amount.

Mr. Castignoli asked if they were spending \$500,000 in total.

Mr. Cummings explained how the numbers were arrived at in this account.

Mr. Fitzpatrick asked about account 7350 Computers and how many computers they would be getting for the \$500,000.

Mr. Richetelli stated they have an inventory of computers they have.

Dr. Feser added some are computer labs that were added in the elementary school.

Mr. Cummings stated 3 labs were added at Law and pointed out digital photograph was added as well.

Mr. Fitzpatrick asked if the students take any computers home.

Mr. Cummings replied no. He spoke of the tablet devices they have bought, but reiterated students do not take them home.

Chairman Lema asked if hardware was included with the computers.

Mr. Cummings replied yes.

8000 – All Other Educational Support

No questions.

Grant Details

Mr. Marlow asked about the Family Resource Center and the amount of use.

Dr. Feser stated it is a wonderful program run by Peggy Kelly, which is well used.

Mr. Fitzpatrick asked about the grants and if the Board of Education knew what they might be receiving.

Dr. Feser stated the better question is whether there has been any reduction. She stated she is aware the IDEA grant has been impacted.

Mr. Cummings spoke of a possible reduction of the Title 1 grant, but nothing was firm as yet.

Mr. Fitzpatrick asked what happens if they don't receive the money.

Mr. Richetelli stated adjustments would have to be made and that they would also have discussions with the Board of Education.

Dr. Feser stated the biggest concern is the IDEA grant which is fundamental to Special Education services.

Mr. Kelleher explained the teacher for the visually impaired had been funded by a grant, but it has been cut.

Mr. Castignoli asked what has been expended from the 2013-2014 budget.

Mr. Richetelli stated he would be happy to provide a breakdown.

Mr. Fitzpatrick asked about the replacement of the synthetic fields.

Mr. Richetelli stated they have the \$415,000 in funds plus financing costs.

Being no further business to discuss, the Board recessed at 8:16 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen K. Huber
Recording Secretary