

*~AD HOC REPORT~*  
**Budget Ad Hoc: Education**  
*Monday, April 17, 2023*

Chairman Levy called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. on Monday, April 17, 2023. Present were Committee Members Irving Fox, Nancy Cammisa, Ben Chianese; and Absent was Richard Molinaro. From the City were Dan Garrick, Finance Director; Les Pinter, Deputy Corporation Counsel; John Kleinhans, Mayor's Office. From Danbury Public Schools were Kevin Walston, Superintendent; Kara Casimiro, Kelly Truchsess, Asst. Superintendents; John Spang, Chief Finance Officer; Michael Seelig, Chief Strategy & Operations Officer; Board of Education (BOE) Members: Ralph Peatfessa, Theresa Buzaid, Michelle Coelho, Luisa Britton, Brigid Guertin, and Gladys Cooper. Ex Officio Members present: Vinny DiGilio, Duane Perkins, Joseph Britton. John Esposito III. Present from the public were CT Institute for Communities (Katie Curan, Leah Tromy, and Joe Walkovich); Tom Brown, Resident; Richard Janelli, Resident; Al Robinson, Resident; and 3 unidentified individuals.

Mr. Walston provided an overview of the Education budget request. Mr. Levy congratulated Danbury Public Schools for receiving five schools of distinctions including a Blue Ribbon recognition. He discussed the incomplete schools budget audit for fiscal year 2021-2022, and noted almost \$3 million surplus returned to the City's General Fund that year. He explained the need to have previous budgets to predict future needs. He discussed current school budget expenditures predicting a deficit of \$9 million for the 2022-2023 fiscal year.

Mr. Spang noted the 2021 surplus was \$2.8 million, due to COVID and remote learning, which decreased costs. For fiscal year 2022-2023, schools requested about \$152 million vs. the \$141 million received by the City; nearly \$12 million difference.

Mr. Walston discussed how the administration will manage the distribution of funds to secondary schools with Mr. Fox. Mr. Fox requested that an analysis presentation be provided for future budget requests. He recommended further evaluating rising costs to prevent a future increase of \$35 million in the next 2-years (as predicted in the school's presentation). Furthermore, he urged the administration to take action now, and noted that the grant funding line (\$34 million) has remained the same for years. Mr. Fox and Mr. Chianese urged the administration to draft a long term (5-year) budget plan. Mr. Walston noted that the administration participated in a task force led by the Mayor's Office to address the project costs and expenses of a new school.

He explained that the schools do receive grant funding from several sources, such as LEAP, to cover operation costs. Mr. Spang clarified for Mr. Chianese the allocation of grant funding totaling \$11.4 million (Esser and Alliance funding), and that schools receive two types of grant funding: competitive grants and entitlements. Mr. Walston confirmed that facility upgrades will help Danbury High School maintain its accreditation. Furthermore, he explained how the administrative positions were reclassified, which resulted in salary increases.

Mr. Levy reiterated the importance of a transparent budget. Mr. Garrick confirmed tax increases will help fund the BOE budget. Mr. Watson explained how absenteeism is being addressed (was 7%, increased to 24%). The two factors increasing absenteeism are Covid and parents (keeping their children home due to sickness). He confirmed the \$1 million & State HVAC grant was not included in the budget (not awarded); the application did not meet the grant qualifications.

Mr. Spang addressed the funding efforts for recruitment with Mr. Britton. Mr. Watson explained how the proposed budget supports recruitment, operation costs, enrollment growth, and educational resources. Mr. Levy suggested reviewing a past study (identifying cost saving strategies) that never moved forward. Mr. DiGilio commented that the common goal is to ensure students of Danbury receive the best education.

The City budget allocates more than 50% to education. Mr. DiGilio urged the board to create a plan to address the following: future funding challenges, absenteeism, staffing, and creative funding. Ms. Truchsess noted the

capacity for onboarding of teachers is 100/170 annually. Mr. Watson confirmed there is a national teacher shortage. Mr. Spang noted that energy/utilities costs have increased due to market inflation.

Mr. Garrick explained to Mr. Perkins that he cannot estimate the effect of the reevaluation on the budget at this time. Mr. Spang discussed plans for cost savings including the review of contracts and positions that will transition from grant funded to the general fund. Mr. Perkins spoke in support of Career Academy funding. Mr. Levy read an exert from and email from Mr. Garrick, explaining the difference between taxpayer funding for students in Hartford (34%) vs. Danbury (83%), and noted the drastic impact that increased State funding could have on taxpayers. He reiterated that 51% of the City budget is spent on education.

Mr. Pietrefesa commented on the BOE's hard work on the proposed budget, and favors the City and the BOE working together to address budget needs and strategizing for the future.

**A motion made by Councilwoman Cammisa, and seconded by Councilman Fox, to recommend that the City Council adopt the Mayor's education budget of \$150,300,000, and an additional \$208,575 for school health and welfare. The motion carries unanimously.**

Mr. Garrick clarified the Head Start funding with Mr. Chianese. Ms. Curan discussed State vs. local funding, for Head Start. The feds fund 80% percent of the budget, and the remaining 20% is funded by State/local. The program serves 90% of families under the poverty level. Furthermore, program funding is vital to continue providing access to early childhood education. Mr. Levy noted the City pays the debt service of the building the program uses.

**A motion made by Councilman Fox, and seconded by Councilwoman Cammisa, to adjourn. The motion carries unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 7:48 p.m.**

Respectfully submitted,  
Warren Levy, Chair  
Irving Fox  
Nancy Cammisa  
Ben Chianese