

AD HOC COMMITTEE—EDUCATION BUDGET

21-c-1

22-APRIL-2014

Chairwoman, Colleen Stanley, called the Committee meeting to order at 7:02 pm.

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:** Chairwoman, Colleen Stanley, Michael Haddad, Joseph Scozzafava, Gregg Seabury and Fredrick Visconti.

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:** None

**EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS PRESENT:** Irving Fox, Peter Nero, John Priola, Andrew Wetmore, Warren Levy, Joseph Cavo, Jack Knapp, Vinny Digilio, Paul Rotello, Philip Curran, and Thomas Saadi.

**ALSO PRESENT:** David St. Hilaire, Director of Finance; Sal V. Pascarella, PhD., Superintendent of Schools; William R. Glass, Deputy Superintendent; Joseph Martino, Director of Finance; Kim Thompson, Director of Human Resources; Deborah Mailloux-Petersen, Director of Special Services.

**BOARD OF EDUCATION MEMBERS PRESENT:** Eileen W. Alberts, Richard M. Janelli, Michael Ferguson, Robert J. Taborsak, and Phyllis Tranzillo.

After making introductions and stating that the purpose of the meeting was to review and evaluate the 2014-2015 Education Budget for Danbury Public Schools, Chairman Stanley asked Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Pascarella, to review the proposed budget.

Dr. Pascarella stated that the mission of Danbury Public Schools is to provide a safe and productive environment for all students. He noted that the proposed budget has more transparency as was requested during last year's budget process. He then asked Mr. Martino to review the proposed budget.

Mr. Martino stated that the 14-15 proposed budget request is \$122,989,689 which is a 3.97% increase over last year's budget. He reviewed details of the increase including staffing for the new middle school. He noted items regarding capital projects completed and underway, energy savings and utility costs, and increase in Health Care insurance benefits. Additionally, ECS and Alliance funding, all day kindergarten and the changes in Head Start were brought to the committee's attention. Mr. Martino then noted the following specific budget items, Salaries increased by 1.96%, employee benefits increased by 3.49%, services increased by 3.99%, special education increased by 30%, equipment increased by 15.14%, dues and fees increased by 6.82%. Finally, Mr. Martino noted the impact of enrollment increases, all day kindergarten, and DRG ranking.

Councilman Haddad asked for clarification regarding the special education costs. Ms. Mailloux-Petersen explained that there are additional per student costs including out of district placement, busing, nursing services and tutors. She explained that some of these costs are reimbursed by the state. She explained that Danbury has a numbers of DCF group homes, and those students generally require special services. Chairwoman Stanley asked for clarification about out of district placements. Dr. Pascarella stated that there are programs, which must be certified by the state, available in some districts that Danbury does not have. He stated that Danbury also takes students from other districts for similar programs. A discussion regarding these programs took place.

Councilman Seabury asked for details regarding security and protection. Dr. Pascarella stated that a comprehensive security audit was completed at each school with the principals. There are protective or intervention programs and reactive measures. He stated that each elementary school has a safety advocate; there are Safety Resource Officers at each Middle School and the High School and policing in collaboration with the Danbury Police Department. Additionally, they have implemented enhanced entrance security measures, panic buttons, walkie-talkies that go directly to the Police Department, high security locks, cameras and additional security for after school programs. Finally he noted that the budget proposal includes a Security Coordinator to work with the Danbury Police Department to continue to implement the Security Audit and complete state required reporting.

Councilman Visconti asked what was covered under Principal Support. Dr. Pascarella explained that a number of schools have different needs in that area. These needs include secretarial, social work and administrative. The money will be used to meet the specific needs of the school.

Councilman Scozzafava asked about the impact of the Paraprofessional pension costs. Ms. Thompson stated that those individuals employed as Paraprofessionals are eligible for the pension plan. However, the district is moving toward a tutor model. Tutors are not eligible for the pension plan. Ms. Thompson added that the Head Start employees are no longer in the City's Pension Plan. Finally, she noted that the pension plan is negotiated by the city separate from the other parts of the collective bargaining agreements.

Councilman Scozzafava asked about the increase enrollment and the distribution of the students. Dr. Pascarella stated that there are various pockets of increased enrollment. A discussion regarding redistricting ensued.

Councilman Seabury asked what the average teacher absence rate was and the impact of substitute teachers on the budget. Ms. Thompson stated that typically there are about 80-90 subs on any given day. The pay rate is \$90/day with additional payments for long-term certified substitutes. A discussion took place regarding reoccurrence rates, sick day buy back building subs, and principal intervention based on data from automated substitute management system.

A discussion regarding the solar panels and utilities costs ensued. A requested was made that the utilities costs electricity and heating costs be reported separately from utilities and repair.

Chairwoman Stanley asked if districting has been discussed with parents and how it was received. Dr. Pascarella stated that it has, and there are measures in place to make it easier. He noted that most parents understand the needs and limitations of the buildings and are accepting of the ideas.

Chairwomen Stanley asked for details about Head Start funding. Mr. Martino stated that the current required cost is \$485,000 which is covered under ECS grants. Last year the cost was \$535,000. Chairwomen Stanley asked if there was a plan for funding these services when ESC funding was no longer available. Dr. Pascarella stated that this funding is dependent on the state, and there is no certain plan to replace it. They will continue to look for additional grant funding and keep in contact with state officials regarding the maintenance of these funds.

An additional conversation took place regarding the \$105,000 excess from the 13-14 budget and \$500,000 placed in the self-insurance fund. Additionally a discussion regarding the difference between the Board of Education budget and the Mayor's Budget took place.

Chairwomen Stanley asked if there were any questions or comments from Board of Education members present. There were none.

Councilman Nero asked for an explanation regarding the Academy schools. Dr. Pascarella stated that the goal is to give parents more choice within the district. He noted that the idea is to put smaller specialized schools within the larger schools. This gives choice, maintains the curriculum, and is cost effective. For example there is Freshmen School at the High School, the Global Academy and the STEM Academy. Further discussion regarding the details and future plans which would increase choice took place.

**Councilman Seabury made a motion which was seconded by Councilman Visconti to recommend to the City Council the adoption of the budget proposed by Mayor Boughton for \$122,003,866 for the Danbury Public Schools 2014-2015 year. Vote, all in favor, motion unanimously approved.**

There being no further business before the committee, Councilman Haddad moved to adjourn. Councilman Seabury seconded the motion. Vote, all in favor, the meeting adjourned at 8:32pm

Respectfully Submitted,

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Colleen Stanley, Committee Chairman

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Gregg Seabury

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Michael Haddad

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Joseph Scozzafava

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Fred Visconti