

**TORRINGTON BOARD OF EDUCATION
Proposed Budget Special Meeting
March 31, 2010**

Torrington High School - 7:00 p.m.

CALL TO ORDER: The meeting was called to order by Mr. Rubino at 7:03 p.m.

Roll Call:

Present: Mr. Cavagnero, Ms. Cogswell, Mrs. Hoehne, Mrs. Kosmulski, Mr. Lyons, Mr. Nargi, Mrs. Raymond, Mr. Rubino, Mr. Traub, Mrs. Batchelder, Mrs. Domanico, Mr. Leone

Absent: Mr. Oliver, Mr. Emmett, Mr. Ji, Mr. Canciani

DISCUSSION AND REVIEW OF 2010-2011 BOE RECOMMENDED BUDGET

Ms. Cogswell opened the discussion and review of the 2010-2011 BOE recommended budget by reviewing the meetings that had already been held and encouraging the Board to bring any other discussion, questions, or concerns to the table at this meeting.

Mr. Traub commented that he hoped that in the next year that the focus could be on the business and tech education classes to offer a more diversified education.

Mr. Leone stated that this coming month, one of the things administration will be bringing to the budget committee is a look at the grants and how that money will be applied in the future.

Ms. Cogswell encouraged Mr. Leone to clear up any misconceptions that have come up in the comments they have received and/or have been written in the press that may need to be clarified.

Mr. Leone responded that costs have been given regarding what it would take to remain at 6 media specialists and to win back a guidance counselor, but he is cautious to do that because the enrollment at THS has not been stable. There are needs not represented in the budget already, such as the Torrington kindergarten growing to above 125 which may necessitate any extra section. There is also significant impact down the road in regards to Title I, and whether or not Vogel-Wetmore and Forbes will make safe harbor or AYP. If they don't, it will be required under federal law to use funds for supplemental educational services. The use of those funds will necessitate moving positions.

There are considerations for possible savings based on out-of-district placements as consolidation continues and transportation costs are looked at. There is an issue with transportation as well with seatbelts. There are many unknowns in the coming months. Real life savings need to be made, and based on enrollment he would place the priority on guidance, and then on the library media specialists.

Mr. Leone acknowledged that \$23.9 million dollars of the budget come from ECS, state funding. If the economy tanks more, the budget may be off another 5%. The budget asks for the use of \$1 million from the insurance surplus to offset the cost to the taxpayers. He thinks the budget right now is as good as it can get considering what is known, but what is known will continue to change.

Ms. Cogswell stated that she thinks what Mr. Leone is saying is this is a fluid situation, so the best estimates and best use of resources are being considered. There are unknowns regarding each fiscal year. Things could get better or worse.

Mr. Leone states this is a conservative budget because of the unknowns. He thinks the budget asks for a right amount, not an unrealistic amount.

Mr. Nargi stated he thought the insurance issue was resolved where the surplus from year to year would go towards the next year. Mr. Leone stated that's correct but this still has to be approved in the budget.

Mr. Nargi asked if Mr. Leone is confident that the City is comfortable about the additional money being requested over last year's budget to which Mr. Leone responded affirmatively.

Mr. Nargi asked why study halls are overseen by teachers rather than parents. Mr. Leone stated he is opposed to having a noncertified person covering a study hall.

Mr. Cavagnero stated he disagreed with eliminating the counselors and the media specialists. He would feel more comfortable putting the money in, even knowing that it will be a fight with the BOF and the Mayor, because the people of Torrington have a vested interest in maintaining the quality of education. He thinks the City of Torrington needs to support the quality of education to attract people to the district and keep people here. Also, the dropout rate has been identified as a problem in the high school for a long time, and the counselors and the media specialists have been critical in lowering that dropout rate.

Mr. Lyons stated one of the things he likes about the budget is the concentration on the at-risk students and the dropouts.

Mr. Leone stated one of the questions asked of the office was regarding a breakdown of the Perkins grant. The large majority of the grant did not appear to have been spent on tech education or business education by previous administrations, but was spread out over programs, materials, and tutors.

He also was asked questions about overtime. Overtime will be dropped by 50%, and closely checked and monitored.

Professional education services will remain flat for student enrichment, and TAG, a slight decrease. After school enrichment and the adult education diploma program will be

included; which justifies the increase. The enrichment was a trade for a teaching position in TAG to get more enrichment to more students. Upward Bound which is \$50,000, will be continued. There will be a reduction in consultants being paid by out of district which will be a decrease of \$10,000. There will be a continuation of Power School, and SEAS, and special education will increase to \$13,000.

There will be a \$20K increase in dues and fees, and an itemized list was included. The greatest increase here comes for TAG, TMS in the form of Apple, the Board technology expense for webcasting, and upgrades to the system of \$3000. There may be savings in this line in relation to Apple, honors and teaming at TMS, and CABE in exchange for legislative services.

In regards to guidance, there will be no change at the elementary level. At TMS, there are currently 3 guidance counselors, roughly 330 to 1, and one home-school liaison covering UBA, 40 to 1. The change next year will be for 2 guidance counselors with a 7th & 8th grade focus, an estimated 300 to 1 pending enrollment. Sixth grade will reduce the transition-to-guidance need, and increase the use of the home-school liaisons at approximately 100 to 1, and the use of the dropout prevention specialist at 100 to 1. It is likely the dropout prevention specialist will carry a guidance certificate, and this may be one of the current counselors. Questions were raised as to where and who the cuts are, and they will fall strictly on the lines of the union certification and seniority lists.

At THS, there are 5 counselors currently for approximately 1120 students, a 225 to 1 ratio. The recommendation will be for 3 counselors at 300 to 1, and inclusion of a 9th grade team to help in transition, and the use of a dropout prevention specialist at 200 to 1. The budget has a plan for extra supports being provided dependent on enrollment, the psychologist, social workers, home-school liaison, dropout specialist, behavior specialist, counselors, advisor and advising model, 6th & 9th grade teams, and positive behavior supports training for staff, and there are still some overlaps.

The budget focus is on relevant and engaging curriculum; fair grading, homework, and attendance practices; addressing root causes; the ability of students to identify at least 1 significant adult with whom he or she has a relationship; a positive school culture; and active engagement of parent and community organizations.

With regards to the library media specialists, there will be no change recommended at the high school where there are currently 4 library media specialists and 1 library Para; a 0.5 reduction of a library media specialist at TMS, continuing with the Para and ensuring that Para is used; and at Vogel-Wetmore, reduction to a 1/2 time media specialist with inclusion of an extra library Para; same for Torrington, South, Forbes, and East.

The 5-year capital plan, 2 additional items were chosen by the administration. The first being the TMS chillers over possibly the course of 2 fiscal years, and the second is to do the full study for the 5-year plan as recommended in the capital plan which may cost significantly less or at the number stated.

Mr. Cavagnero asked about the cost for a garage at THS, which has been quoted as approximately \$178,000, but the recommendation was to remove that cost for this year.

Athletics were flat lined for this year, and the only significant increase to THS was the music department receiving funding for uniforms.

The cost to add back all guidance including keeping a dropout specialist and a behavior specialist which may be guidance certified positions would be \$215,762 plus benefits.

Mr. Rubino stated that the Board has to decide if this appropriate, as it is now the Board's budget and before the Board for their decision, and now would be the time to add or subtract items from the budget.

Mr. Rubino reminded the Board, in regards to the 5-year capital plan that the Board had wished to do \$1.9 million worth of work. After discussion with Mr. Leone, and in going over the possibility of staying the line and keeping the educational process intact, he doesn't want to continue to take away from this line item.

Mr. Lyons asked for an explanation in regards to Southeast possibly coming back and how that might affect the capital budget this year.

Mr. Leone responded that it would not come back until the City has resolved its current renter agreement. Ideally, this would make a great alternative education facility for Torrington and possibly a regional option. Southeast is in fairly good condition and is a viable option. He cautioned against Southeast becoming just a special education facility.

Mr. Nargi asked about federal monies that might be available for a new structure and a regional school.

Mr. Leone responded that eligibility is related to reimbursement rates for construction through the district. There are also limits on when grants can be applied for and when money can be reimbursed. There are regional schools, but not really a true regional alternative model. Possibly applying as a magnet for an alternative model might be an option. A partnership model might also be an option. There are competitive grants running in coordination with The Race to the Top, called the innovation grants. These may be looked at to offset costs. There are federal dollars for dropout prevention work as well. With regards to the capital plan, Mr. Leone stated that the fiscal years of 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 look miserable as a result of pushing. Eventually pushing costs just leads to the point where the money has to be spent.

Mr. Rubino stated that the understanding was to go with a town referendum and maybe assistance from the City, putting the City's buildings along with this, and then the voters will decide yes or no. The whole idea of the 5-year plan is to be budget conscious with an average amount. The Board has to think about the needs for the school, but the amount for the capital plan can't jump from \$577,000 in one year to \$2.2 million the next year. A good medium needs to be established.

Mr. Leone stated in regards to the 2011-2012 bigger ticket items, the majority are eligible for state reimbursement. The plan for THS includes the garage, the new track, the bleachers, the repaving of the upper parking lot, and the painting of the gymnasium and exterior of school. For TMS, the plan includes the chillers.

Mr. Cavagnero asked about the cost for the garage, \$178,000, which would house equipment that the City owns and keep it from deteriorating. Mr. Bascetta responded that these costs are approximate.

Mr. Traub stated that he would look at 2011-2012, because at the 2 meetings he attended the main focus was on the guidance counselors and library media specialists. He would rather see class size reduced by adding another teacher and/or rather address the fact that the Board is looking for \$2.3 million for capital next year. He would recommend going with the new guidance plan with the behavioral therapist, and then look to moving money to the 5-year plan for the building. He would slide money for the chillers for TMS, but would not recommend the garage. He would be interested in hard assets, getting the chillers and doing the roofs, and possibly the track.

Mr. Nargi stated as concerning the food service program area renovation, this is the type of program he would like to see money spent on immediately for the coming academic year so the students can benefit right away.

Mr. Leone stated that is concerning the construction and extension of a new culinary arts program in the tech wing. The equipment piece of that expense could go into the Perkins.

Another Board member asked about partnering with Oliver Wolcott Technical School in regards to that.

Mr. Leone responded that Oliver Wolcott has an entry program there that limits some of the partnerships. Ideally, partnering would allow use of some of their facilities after school. It is a long-term tangible road map, and this program and other programs will be further discussed in May and June.

Mr. Cavagnero stated that his favorite project was the robotics program beginning in the elementary school.

Mr. Rubino asked if anyone wanted to add anything to the 5-year capital plan.

The Board stated their priorities as the windows at East School, and the chillers at TMS.

Mr. Rubino suggested putting the chillers into the budget this year and seeing what happens. It would put an additional \$383,000 into the budget.

Mr. Leone stated that every \$340,000 adds an additional 1% to the City.

Mr. Rubino stated that he thinks the 5-year plan needs to be reinvented. There are items that have to be done for maintenance and repair, and that have to go through a referendum process with the City. He recommended letting the 5-year plan go through as it is for this year. Board members were in agreement with this plan.

Mr. Nargi asked about Upward Bound at the high school for next year.

Mr. Leone stated the 9th grade will be teamed into one larger team, and then there will be a behavior specialist as well. It is not specifically an Upward Bound continuation, but a greater emphasis on the transition into high school. To add 2 teachers for Upward Bound at the high school would cost about \$150,000.

Mr. Lyons asked about the teaming for the 9th graders to help their transition into high school.

Mr. Leone stated it is getting to the behavior and discipline issues before they become suspension or expulsion problems.

Mrs. Raymond commented that last year the Board got very strong indications from the City that they wanted to zero in, and now the talk is about adding things to the budget.

Mr. Leone responded that the number has been discussed with the City, and he is confident in the number. He believes it is fair and justified, but he cautions adding things because AYP needs to be achieved, which will be unknown until July 1st. Title I funds are going to have to be allocated.

Mr. Rubino stated that the needs of the children are by far the greatest priority of the Board.

Mr. Cavagnero stated he would like to see more information about details of how the guidance department is going to be restructured and managed.

Many of the Board members commended the administration on the budget and expressed their support for it.

VOTE ON THE 2010-2011 BOE RECOMMENDED BUDGET

Mr. Lyons moved and Mrs. Raymond supported a motion to approve the 2010-2011 BOE Recommended Budget of \$64,971,592. The motion carried. The vote was unanimous.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:52 p.m. All were in favor.