

**TOWN OF SIMSBURY  
BOARD OF EDUCATION**

Record of Proceedings

Special Meeting

February 21, 2024

Mr. Jeff Tindall called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. in the Board of Education Conference Room.

Roll Call:

**Members present:** Mmes. Jen Batchelar, Tara Willerup, Lydia Tedone, Sharon Thomas and Jessica Parise. Messrs. Jeff Tindall, Brian Watson and Josh Falco.

**Also present:** Superintendent Matt Curtis, Assistant Superintendent Sue Homrok-Lemke, Assistant Superintendent Neil Sullivan, Director of Finance Amy Meriwether, BOE Student Representative Sophia Luzietti and Recording Secretary Katie Wilde.

PUBLIC AUDIENCE

None.

Public Audience

COMMITTEE REPORTS/BOE COMMUNICATIONS

Ms. Luzietti reported on activities being held at the elementary schools. She noted that HJMS is holding their 6<sup>th</sup> grade parent orientation. The next parent series on managing teen anxiety is later this week, as well as Neon Night. Ms. Luzietti noted the success of Guys and Dolls at SHS as well as the success of the winter sports teams.

Communications

Mr. Falco reported on the Communications Committee meeting. He stated the committee discussed the soon to be released Vision of a Graduate video, updating the BOE budget website, and holding a community event when the Latimer Lane School project is completed.

Ms. Thomas stated a Policy Committee meeting is being held tomorrow. She stated that she and Ms. Tedone attending a meeting at CABE regarding chronic absenteeism and requested an update be provided to the board around this topic. Ms. Lemke noted that social worker PLCs look at this data. Ms. Sullivan stated that each school has an attendance team and a notification system.

Ms. Batchelar praised Ms. Liz MacKay for the Capstone video links included in the SHS Program of Studies. Ms. Tedone reported on CABE's CT Unspoken Crisis conference and their efforts with the Dalio Education. She also reported on the NSBA conference and legislative priorities at the federal level.

Ms. Willerup reported on the Curriculum Committee meeting where they discussed our curriculum online platform, applied art credit, the Kindergarten waiver process and the artificial intelligence team. Ms. Lemke stated that the CSDE, in partnership with DonorsChoose, recently offered mini grants for teachers. Twenty of our teachers received grants.

Mr. Sullivan reported on the progress of the Latimer Lane School project. He stated that the meeting with state officials relative to the furniture, fixtures, equipment and technology has taken place. The board will vote at the next meeting on these items

totaling \$1.6 million.

Mr. Curtis reported on this morning's legislative update. He stated that it was well attended as many districts are upset and concerned with the shuffling of money from the Excess Cost Grant to preschool that is proposed in the Governor's budget. Mr. Curtis noted that the Excess Cost Grant legislation states that districts should be reimbursed at a rate of 85%. Last year the rate was 73% and it is anticipated that this year the rate will be 68%, which is a decrease of \$200,000. He noted that special ed needs are up across the state.

### RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

#### A. Approval of Minutes of January 23, 2024 Meeting

Ms. Willerup: MOVE to approve the minutes of the January 23, 2024 meeting.

Ms. Thomas: Seconded. So moved.

#### B. Approval of Minutes of January 31, 2024 Workshop

Ms. Thomas: MOVE to approve the minutes of the January 31, 2024 workshop.

Ms. Batchelar: Seconded. So moved. Ms. Tedone and Ms. Willerup abstained.

#### C. Approval of Minutes of February 3, 2024 Workshop

Ms. Willerup: MOVE to approve the minutes of the February 3, 2024 workshop as amended.

Ms. Batchelar: Seconded. So moved.

#### D. Personnel

Ms. Parise: MOVE to accept the resignation of Phil Isner effective February 4, 2024.

Mr. Watson: Seconded. So moved.

Ms. Thomas: MOVE to accept the retirements of Doug Nielson, Martha O'Rourke, and Lori Worthen effective June 30, 2024.

Ms. Parise: Seconded. So moved.

#### E. Adoption of Capital Improvement Plan

Mr. Curtis noted that the capital plan has come before the board for review multiple times. He stated the focus is on 4 projects for next year: Tootin' Hills roof replacement, SHS auditorium/amphitheater improvements, district flooring improvements, and district network infrastructure improvements.

Ms. Tedone: MOVE that the Board of Education Six Year Capital Improvement Plan for the period 2025-2030 be adopted.

Approval of  
Minutes of  
January 23,  
2024

Approval of  
Minutes of  
January 31,  
2024 Workshop

Approval of  
Minutes of  
February 3,  
2025 Workshop

Personnel

Adoption of 6  
Year CIP

Mr. Falco: Seconded. So moved.

INFORMATION AND REPORTS

A. 2024-25 Superintendent’s Budget

2024-25  
Superintendent’s  
Budget

Mr. Curtis stated his budget is prioritized along the district’s strategic plan and board goals. He reviewed the budget development process between November and February. Mr. Curtis stated his proposed budget of \$86,270,668, an increase of 4.97% or \$4,088,533 over last year’s budget. He presented historic budget data, a per pupil expenditure comparison, and a 5 year enrollment comparison for both regular ed and special ed students. He noted the need to balance education needs with fiscal reality.

Mr. Curtis stated that he presented a 6.93% budget at the board workshop and tonight’s presentation is a reduction of \$1.6 million. New staffing requests have been offset so that staffing remains flat. Budget reduction key drivers include staffing reductions/reallocations, the use of health insurance reserves, and a change in health insurance lowering the increase assumption from 3% to 1.7%.

Mr. Curtis discussed student growth and success, sustainable and strategic investments, and the Vision of a Graduate. He reviewed the main budget drivers: contractual obligations total \$2,738,069, a 3.33% increase; market driven increases in special ed transportation; utilities, software and technology; and supplies/textbooks/services that includes \$70,000 in expenditures for the new math program.

Mr. Curtis addressed last year’s budgetary deficits, in particular the increase in special ed costs due to increased out of district tuition, which increased by 11%-14%, and increased third party service costs. He reviewed budgetary increases in the areas of health insurance, pension, and social emotional learning.

Mr. Curtis discussed the regular and special ed staffing requests for 2024-25. On the regular ed side there are 2 requests. One for a 0.2 FTE elementary strings teacher and 0.2 FTE for an American Sign Language (ASL) teacher at SHS. These requests are both enrollment related, including the addition of an ASL class at SHS, and total \$40,644. On the special ed side the request is for 2.0 Intensive Learning Needs (ILN) teachers, an ILN program coordinator, an Educational Support Specialist (ESS) teacher at SHS, a reading specialist at HJMS and a Pre-K ESS special ed teacher. All of these requests are enrollment driven and total \$614,654.

Mr. Curtis reviewed the reductions and reallocations to offset the staffing requests. Utilization of the internal service fund will offset \$650,000. Moving a position to the IDEA grant and repurposing a projected vacancy are a savings of \$101,609 each. The reassignment of non-classroom teachers and certified staff positions, totaling 4-5 FTE will provide an offset of \$584,273. These reductions, with an additional \$40,644 in miscellaneous reductions, total \$1,478,135. Mr. Curtis provided a summary of the main budget drivers and the corresponding reductions resulting in a budget increase of \$4,088,533 or 4.97%.

Mr. Curtis discussed a proposal to make changes to the Capital Non-Recurring

(CNR) account. He noted that the amount in CNR has not changed since its inception 20-25 years ago. Mr. Curtis proposed an increase of \$700,000 to address significant building needs, with full funding implemented over a 5 year period. This change would have a budgetary impact of \$140,000. If added to the proposed budget, the budget increase would total \$4,228,533 or 5.15%.

Mr. Tindall thanked the administration for the arduous work that goes into creating the budget. He suggested that the CNR increase makes sense. Ms. Meriwether stated the BOF would be open to a discussion on CNR, but it will depend on the finances. Mr. Tindall stated that if the board believes that 5.15% has value, it would make sense to go in at that increase.

Ms. Batchelar asked if we had an ILN coordinator in the past that we repurposed. Mr. Curtis responded that this program has seen such growth that it requires a coordinator, noting that a department supervisor will be reallocated. Ms. Batchelar questioned whether we should tell the BOF we cannot reallocate these positions. Ms. Parise questioned the impact to the student body. Mr. Curtis stated that these changes are appropriate at this time and he would not create a scenario that undermines what we are doing. He noted that these are 5 positions out of 800 in the district. Ms. Willerup stated that we are always trying to be more efficient.

Ms. Batchelar asked if the increase in CNR would be used to address our bus issues. Ms. Meriwether stated that \$300,000 would be allocated for buses. Ms. Thomas questioned student utilization of the buses. Mr. Sullivan stated that buses at the elementary level are heavily used and we did cut back 2 buses this year.

Ms. Willerup asked if any of the new special ed staffing is a result of mandates. Mr. Curtis responded that we legally need to provide the services outlined in the students IEP. Ms. Thomas questioned how we will know if we are going to need more staffing next year. Mr. Curtis stated that it will depend on the enrollment as to whether we are staffed appropriately. Ms. Parise noted that we don't know if the increased enrollment in the ILN program this year is an outlier, and asked how much flexibility we will have next year with staffing. Mr. Curtis responded that there will not be much flexibility.

Mr. Watson stated that of the 4.97% increase, 66% are contractual obligations. He noted that what is being discussed is about moving small numbers. He stated that the budget that has been put forward is very good. Ms. Willerup stated that we are proud of our teachers and we don't want to put budgetary matters on their backs. Mr. Curtis pointed out that for the better part of a decade the BOE was able to put forward lower budget numbers as our enrollment was declining, but that is no longer the case. Mr. Watson noted that in the year's when the budget increase was 1.5% it was not because there were lower contracts, there were other factors involved.

Ms. Parise questioned how we would fund another position over the course of next year if needed. Mr. Curtis stated that in the past we have taken money from elsewhere in the budget if we needed to make a hire. He explained the use of the non-lapsing fund. Mr. Falco agreed that times were different in past budget years and noted that the Simsbury school district continues to rank well.

PUBLIC AUDIENCE

None.

Public Audience

ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Willerup: MOVE to adjourn the meeting at 8:35 p.m.

Ms. Batchelar: Seconded. So moved.

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Sharon Thomas  
Secretary

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Katie Wilde  
Recording Secretary

Adjournment