

**TOWN OF SIMSBURY  
BOARD OF EDUCATION**

Record of Proceedings

Regular Meeting

February 27, 2024

Mr. Jeff Tindall called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. in the Library Media Center of Squadron Line School.

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, Director of Infrastructure & Technology Jason Casey, BOE Student Representative Sophia Luzietti and Recording Secretary Katie Wilde.

PUBLIC AUDIENCE

Members of the SHS Earth Advocates: Bobby Shipman, Erin Sim, Brynn Bordeau and Claire Lepak spoke about their support for putting solar panels on our schools. They noted the environmental benefits and the cost effectiveness for the district.

Public Audience

COMMITTEE REPORTS/BOE COMMUNICATIONS

Ms. Luzietti reported on HJMS Neon Night, Latimer Lane School bingo and the Central School auction. She noted that a freshman member of the SHS wrestling team is a state champion, a capstone question and answer session is being held, and graduating seniors can now apply for SHS scholarships.

Communications

Ms. Willerup stated she is glad that students came and spoke to the board during public audience. Ms. Tedone noted that March 13 is CABA Day on the Hill and she will speak with the student representatives about attending. Ms. Thomas also stated she is glad the students came and spoke to the board. She reported that the Policy Committee met last week and anticipate bringing policy revision first drafts to the board during a March meeting.

Mr. Casey reported that the Tariffville modular project is complete and students are occupying the space. Ms. Thomas asked Mr. Casey what he reported on at the Board of Selectmen meeting last night, as well as the status of air conditioning at Squadron Line School. He stated that we ran into some drainage issues due to the heavy equipment that was brought in. An additional \$18,000 was approved by the BOS and will go before the BOF on March 5. Mr. Casey reported that air conditioning was being considered as a remedy for a humidity issue at Squadron Line School. Since then we located a plumbing leak and are using equipment to remove water from carpeting so we are holding back on the funding for air conditioning. Mr. Casey addressed the comments regarding solar panels. He stated the strategy for solar panels is that as we replace roofs we wait a couple of years to make sure there are no issues, and then look toward adding solar panels. He noted that the new roof at Latimer Lane is solar ready, and the next two roof projects are at Tootin' Hills and Tariffville School.

Ms. Lemke reported that culinary students will compete in the ProStar Invitational

against other districts at Dunkin' Donuts Park on Wednesday. She noted the growth of the culinary program.

### RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

#### A. Latimer Lane Furniture & Equipment Specs Approval

Mr. Casey stated that this is a DAS requirement for Phase 3 of reimbursements that must be approved by the boards before going out to bid. He noted the budget for this phase is \$1,615,000.

Ms. Willerup: MOVE that the Board of Education approve the plans, drawing and project manuals for Phase 3 Furniture, Fixtures and Equipment (FF&E) & Technology as prepared by Tecton Architects dated February 2, 2024 along with the professional cost estimate for the Latimer Lane Renovation Project.

Mr. Watson: Seconded. So moved.

#### B. Approval of The Peter T. Blake Scholarship

Ms. Thomas: MOVE that the Board of Education approve The Peter T. Blake Memorial Music Scholarship, to be disbursed starting in 2024.

Ms. Willerup: Seconded. So moved.

#### C. Adoption of 2024-25 School Budget

Mr. Curtis stated that a budget increase of 6.93% was presented by the administration to the board at the budget workshop. He noted that last week he presented a 4.97% budget to the board, which is a reduction of \$1.6 million. At that meeting there was further discussion about including funds to increase the amount of the CNR budget. Mr. Curtis stated that next Tuesday the board will present their budget to the Board of Finance. He pointed out that the BOF may provide some direction to the board, noting that the BOF has the authorization to set the final budget number. He stated that the average superintendent budget request for Hartford area superintendents is 5.96%.

Mr. Tindall noted the work done by the administration and staff to reduce the numbers and offset potential hirings. He stated that it is a tough budget year with zero Grand List growth, noting that there is already pushback on the numbers. Mr. Tindall stated that the CNR conversation is ongoing, and he recommended the board put forth a 4.97% budget. Mr. Curtis noted that he would still put forward the proposed CNR plan during the presentation to the BOF.

Ms. Thomas stated she supports tonight's motion without the inclusion of additional CNR funding. Ms. Tedone stated she does not like the optics of a 4% vs. 5% budget when there is the opportunity to have a discussion about CNR at a later time. Ms. Willerup agreed that moving forward with 4.97% would be prudent. She stated she wishes the increase could be smaller, but the board needs to meet the needs of students. Mr. Watson noted that if you look at the line item fixed cost increases he does not see how we can get much leaner.

Latimer FF&E  
Spec Approval

Approval of  
Peter T. Blake  
Scholarship

Adoption of  
2024-25 Budget

Mr. Falco noted that peer superintendent budgets are over 5% and there is a list of things we can do with a higher CNR budget. He stated he is fine with whichever increase the board moves forward, but suggested the board consider optics versus responsibility. Mr. Falco stated that an increase in CNR could do a lot of good, and he doesn't want to lessen the value. Ms. Willerup noted that CNR is about keeping town buildings safe and should be a priority.

Mr. Curtis stated we need to look at how we weigh a number versus the tax impact and net program impact. He suggested that a reduction of perhaps an additional couple of hundred thousand dollars would show an effort, but we need to analyze what that actually yields to solve the problem due to the lack of revenue, not expenditures.

Ms. Parise noted that there is a negligible difference to families between a 4.97% increase vs. a 5.15% increase. She stated that she appreciates the effort to lower the number, but suggested that perhaps we should increase CNR by even more. Ms. Thomas stated the board needs to be cognizant of the tax increase after last year's increase, noting that we no longer have tax revenue from The Hartford.

Ms. Tedone: MOVE that the Board of Education adopt the 2024-25 Public School budget in the amount of \$86,270,668 which represents an increase of \$4,088,533 or 4.97%.

Ms. Batchelar: Seconded. So moved.

INFORMATION AND REPORTS

A. Squadron Line School Report

Meg Evans, Principal, noted the school goals which are based on district goals and ultimately BOE goals. She noted the 3 areas of focus for Squadron Line in 2023-24: teaching & learning – student achievement and professional learning communities; sense of community & belonging – SHINE rebrand and the power of positive teams/leadership; and behavior – clear expectations for students and staff with all being held accountable for their actions.

Nancy Forsberg, Assistant Principal, discussed special ed service delivery. She stated that weekly planning sessions allow general ed and special ed teachers to collaborate and provide feedback that benefits all students. The ability for special ed students to be in general ed classes and professional development for teachers leads to better outcomes for students.

Ms. Evans stated that the SHINE program was rebranded in September after collective feedback. She discussed the service projects that took place during Squadron Line Kindness Day and the pay it forward challenge. Ms. Evans discussed the tiers of behavior intervention resource guide being created to address common expectations, positive reinforcement in classrooms, and a common discipline approach.

Ms. Evans addressed the challenges at Squadron Line which include space, the growth of the ILN program and funding implications for school building needs. She

Squadron Line Report

thanked the board for their support.

Ms. Thomas asked if, with the greater focus on SHINE, have behaviors changed as a result? Ms. Evans responded that behaviors are tracked and the administration is looking further at the behaviors. She stated that assemblies are now held every month, with some run by students, and work is being done with the faculty. Ms. Forsberg stated that the administration is learning how to look at the data differently and which students to focus on. Ms. Evans stated this is in conjunction with our SEL work. Ms. Thomas stated her appreciation for the service project program, showing students and letting them do.

Mr. Tindall noted that having a sense of belonging is important work and behaviors are a form of communication. He asked if the space issue is at a tipping point. Ms. Evans responded that space is a problem. Orchestra lessons rotate through spaces, programs are sharing space. Ms. Evans stated that they are doing the best they can with students at the center of the discussion. Mr. Falco noted that CNR funding is necessary to address drainage and electrical issues at the school. He pointed out that space for students to learn properly is another issue to be addressed.

PUBLIC AUDIENCE

None.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Thomas: MOVE to adjourn the meeting at 7:27 p.m.

Ms. Willerup: Seconded. So moved.

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Sharon Thomas  
Secretary

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Katie Wilde  
Recording Secretary

Public Audience

Adjournment