

**TOWN OF SIMSBURY
BOARD OF EDUCATION**

Record of Proceedings

Special Meeting

March 18, 2024

Mr. Jeff Tindall called the meeting to order at 6:31 p.m. in the Board of Education Conference Room.

Roll Call:

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

Members absent: Ms. Jen Batchelar

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

PUBLIC AUDIENCE

None.

Public Audience

COMMITTEE REPORTS/BOE COMMUNICATIONS

Communications

Mr. Picoult reported on the SpongeBob Musical at HJMS. He noted the girls basketball team won the CIAC state championship, the SHS Robotics team had a top 10 finish, full year engineering students participated in the SeaPerch competition, the National Honor Society sponsored a Pi Run, juniors will take the SAT in school on Wednesday, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) Week will be held 4/1-4/5, and Peter and the Star Catcher is the SHS spring play.

Mr. Falco congratulated the girls basketball team and boys hockey team. He stated his appreciation for the older students who worked with the youth lacrosse program last weekend. Ms. Parise congratulated the winning sports teams, and noted that wrestling did well with a freshman receiving All State and New England recognition.;

Ms. Tedone reported on CAFE Day on the Hill which she attended with BOE student representative Sophia Luzietti. She noted some of the bills before the legislature which include removal of the prohibition for BOE member compensation, paraeducator pay, and how much funding comes from the towns versus the state. Ms. Tedone stated that the Mandate Relief Committee will receive more than 300 proposals.

Ms. Willerup noted that SeaPerch is an underwater robotics program.

Ms. Lemke reported on our first year membership in the District Education Clubs of America (DECA), noting that 12 of our students qualified for the national competition in Anaheim. She stated the Gertrude Banks Gospel Choir performed at the American Choral Directors Association. Family & Consumer Science teacher Gianna Gurga was named the CT ProStart Culinary Educator of the Year. Ms. Lemke provided photos of some of the items purchased with the Donors Choose CSDE Grants, and noted that the SHS Robotics team placed 3rd in their competition and received the creativity award.

Mr. Tindall shared congratulations for all of the accomplishments. Mr. Curtis spoke about the amazing environment at the girls basketball final at Mohegan Sun. He noted that one of our players sang the national anthem and our unified basketball team played during halftime.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

A. Approval of Minutes of February 21, 2024 Special Meeting

Mr. Watson: MOVE to approve the minutes of the February 21, 2024 Special Meeting.

Ms. Parise: Seconded. So moved.

B. Approval of Minutes of February 27, 2024 Meeting

Ms. Willerup: MOVE to approve the minutes of the February 27, 2024 meeting

Ms. Tedone: Seconded. So moved.

C. Personnel

Ms. Parise: MOVE that the Board of Education accept the retirements of Elaine Kotler and Paula Garza effective June 30, 2024.

Ms. Thomas: Seconded. So moved.

D. Approval of Simsbury Community Media Scholarship

Ms. Thomas: MOVE that the Board of Education approve the Simsbury Community Media Scholarship, to be disbursed in 2024.

Ms. Parise: Seconded. So moved

E. Adoption of Educator Diversity Plan

Mr. Sullivan stated that Human Resources has been working toward a more diverse workforce. Last year legislation was passed stating that school districts need to have a diversity policy, accompanied by a plan. Mr. Sullivan stated that a team of six (Tayarisha Batchelor, Cindi Freilinger, Meg Evans, Katie Krasula and Vanessa Massiah and himself) began developing documents regarding recruiting, hiring, selection strategies and post hire retention last spring. He noted that the state has required that a particular template be used and, after approval by the board and submission to the state, the state will provide feedback after 2 months.

Ms. Batchelar stated a rubric was supplied through WestEd with whom we also had conversations about what they were looking for in the plan. Ms. Thomas asked if the state approves the plan are we ready to collect the data and provide metrics? Ms. Batchelar responded by providing data on our hiring and retention of diverse individuals over the past few years. She noted that the focus is on retention, providing a feeling of belonging, as the best strategy for recruitment. Ms. Batchelar

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stated that currently the district has a BIPOC affinity group, Legitimate Intentional and Tenacious (LIT) and Employee Resource Groups (ERG) are offered to any group looking for a feeling of belonging.

Mr. Curtis stated that during the Strategic Plan reboot we will look at how it dovetails with this plan. Mr. Sullivan noted that the state is working with higher education to increase the pool of diverse candidates.

Ms. Tedone: MOVE that the Board of Education approve the Increasing Educator Diversity Plan.

Ms. Willerup: Seconded. So moved.

F. Adoption of Revised 2024-25 Public School Budget

Mr. Curtis stated that he presented the BOE approved budget to the BOF on March 5 with a budget increase of 4.97%. With the financial challenges the town is facing, the BOF requested the BOE relook at their budget with a target of 4.3%. Mr. Curtis stated he will present a recommended budget increase of 4.4%.

Mr. Sullivan reviewed the reductions and reallocations that brought the original budget down from 6.93% to 4.97%. These include utilization of the internal service fund, reallocation of one of the new special ed positions to the IDEA grant, reallocation of a reading position for HJMS due to a retirement, reduction of a position at SHS due to course enrollment offset by a retirement, reduction of a PreK-6 special ed department supervisor to be replaced with the ILN coordinator, reduction of a language arts consultant moving to an elementary teaching position and reallocation of the technology resource teacher to a teaching position.

Mr. Curtis reviewed the reductions from 4.97%. (1) The requested increase of \$10,000 in textbooks will not be granted and the current budget of \$168,000 will remain in place. (2) A reduction of \$50,000 in library media books and supplies reducing the \$100,000 currently budgeted. This will lessen the number of new books purchased but will allow for the replacement of books and subscriptions we maintain. (3) A \$200,000 reduction in the grant used to purchase equipment. The increase of \$400,000 in the Choice grant 7-8 years ago allowed us to allocate \$400,000 for equipment. We also use the grant to allow flexibility in the budget. (4) Instructional supplies are a \$825,000 line item and the budget increase request was for an additional \$54,000. The increase will not be granted and the line item will be reduced \$26,000. (5) The strings teacher will remain as it is at .8 FTE and not increased to 1.0 FTE. (6) We currently have 110 elementary sections that Mr. Sullivan monitors regularly. As of today we could go with one less section and keep within the class size guidelines. Mr. Curtis stated that these recommended reductions total \$461,322 and any further reductions would impact programming.

Mr. Tindall thanked the BOF for the conversation after the BOE budget presentation, noting that the BOF is faced with limitations. Mr. Curtis noted that the BOF also reduced the BOS budget.

Ms. Parise asked what the budget percentage change would be if we kept the .2 strings teacher in the budget. Ms. Meriwether responded 4.44%. Ms. Parise asked if enrollment has increased in the strings program since the dip during COVID. Mr.

Adoption of
Revised 2024-
25 Public School
Budget

Tindall responded that this is not a must have item. Mr. Sullivan stated we have hired a new person at .8.

Mr. Falco stated that 4.3% is just a number and he questioned how bigger classes affects kids and if a .8 strings teacher is what Simsbury wants. Ms. Parise asked if a full time strings teacher would provide more flexibility for kids. Ms. Lemke responded that she cannot say definitively as the elementary schedule is packed every day.

Ms. Parise questioned the reduction in the equipment line item through the grant. Mr. Curtis stated that equipment requests are prioritized and sometimes we do not fund a full \$400,000 in equipment. Ms. Parise expressed concern with creating a cliff. Mr. Curtis responded that this is a line item we will need to revisit in the future. Ms. Parise stated that she appreciates the work that was done to not affect students with the reductions.

Mr. Falco noted that reducing a tech resource impacts the school. He stated the board's charge is what's reasonable and at what point are you hitting bone. Mr. Falco questioned the reduction in instructional supplies, when costs have risen, and whether the budget increase should be more than 4.4%. The board discussed the continued purchase of books with the reduction in library media books and supplies.

Mr. Curtis stated the challenge is that there are not many places to go for reductions outside of people in the organization. He stated the administration did an analysis and he pointed out the fiscal number is decided by the BOF.

Ms. Tedone stated we don't want to offend anyone by not doing our due diligence. She noted that salaries and benefits take most of the budget and other reductions will affect special ed. Ms. Thomas noted that not everyone in the community has children and increases in taxes do affect residents. She stated that schools help property values but there's a question as to how long people can afford to stay in the community.

Mr. Falco questioned whether it is his role as a board member to solve everything or to make sure that our top notch school district doesn't slide back. He noted that you cannot solve issues by creating other issues. Mr. Falco stated that 4.97% was an honest and fair number and he expressed concern that we have hit bone and how sustainable that is over time. Ms. Parise expressed her agreement with Mr. Falco and questioned if next year we are in the same position, with increased special ed and enrollment, are we going to cut more non-student facing numbers.

Mr. Tindall stated that he thinks everyone shares these concerns, but the board has been given an assignment and the BOF has the ultimate decision. Mr. Curtis stated the tenor of the BOF was different this year, noting the original request was for a 1.75% budget increase. He stated we are funding special ed to a more accurate level and expressed his appreciation for the dialogue of the board.

Mr. Falco asked where we landed with CNR. Ms. Meriwether stated that the BOF is open to the proposal to add \$700,000 on the BOE side and \$300,000 on the BOS side.

Ms. Willerup: MOVE that the Board of Education adopt the revised 2024-25 Public School budget in the amount of \$85,809,346 which represents an

increase of \$3,627,211 or 4.41%.

Mr. Watson: Seconded.

Ms. Willerup thanked the administration for keeping the reductions away from students. Ms. Parise stated she will vote for the budget reductions reluctantly. She stated this is not a sustainable process when you are not getting the budget you feel is adequate. She noted the many legal obligations put on the district by the state.

So moved. The motion carried, Ms. Thomas abstained.

INFORMATION AND REPORTS

A. Next Generation Accountability Report

Ms. Lemke stated that the CT accountability systems have measures to track progress and preparation of students for career and college success. She noted that these reports have not been available since before COVID. Ms. Lemke stated the purpose of the accountability system is to track student progress, help schools and districts make improvements, show where support is needed most, recognize successes, promote transparency, and satisfy federal and state requirements.

Ms. Lemke addressed the District Performance Index (DPI). Schools and districts earn points on a broad set of 12 indicators. These include achievement and growth, with growth weighted more heavily. Ms. Lemke stated the intent is to give a more holistic view of performance and includes measures as to whether gaps exist or not between high needs and non-high needs students. She listed the 12 DPI indicators: (1) academic achievement (performance index), (2) academic growth, (3) assessment participation rate, (4) chronic absenteeism, (5) preparation for postsecondary and career readiness – coursework, (6) preparation for postsecondary and career readiness – exams, (7) graduation – on track in 9th grade, (8) graduation – 4 year adjusted cohort, (9) graduation – 6 year adjusted cohort, (10) postsecondary entrance rate, (11) physical fitness, and (12) arts access.

Ms. Lemke provided ratings for each of our schools and the district. She noted the achievement gap at SHS in ELA/Math, stating that we have high level achievement at SHS and the gap is primarily due to special ed. Ms. Lemke pointed out the category assigned to each school. She stated that Squadron Line, Tariffville and Tootin' Hills School have been designated as Schools of Distinction. These schools are in the top 10% for overall performance, growth and have no gaps nor a participation rate lower than 95%. All of the elementary schools received a category 2 assignment. SHS received a 3 due to the achievement gap and HJMS received a 3 based around some achievement that we are addressing this year.

Ms. Lemke addressed the steps taken since these reports were released in December. Results were shared with principals both individually and collectively. Results are being used to inform building based adjustments. The accountability system results were shared with department supervisors. Ms. Lemke stated that areas of focus have been determined. These areas include physical fitness, chronic absenteeism and ELA/Math gaps at SHS. Ms. Lemke outlined the work to date in these areas.

Next Generation
Accountability
Report

Ms. Parise asked if we have a DRG comparison of the accountability report. Mr. Curtis pointed out that across the state there are differently configured elementary and middle schools so it is difficult to compare equally.

PUBLIC AUDIENCE

None.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Watson: MOVE to adjourn the meeting at 8:34 p.m.

Ms. Willerup: Seconded. So moved.

Sharon Thomas
Secretary

Katie Wilde
Recording Secretary

Public Audience

Adjournment