

**DANBURY BOARD OF EDUCATION  
BOARD WORKSHOP MEETING MINUTES  
FEBRUARY 21, 2018**

Present: Rachel Chaleski, Gladys Cooper, Richard Jannelli, Patrick Johnston, Frederick Karrat, Farley Santos, Amy Spallino

Absent: Richard Hawley, David Metrena, Kathleen Molinaro, Emanuela Palmares,

Also Present: Sal Pascarella, Joe Martino, Kim Thompson; City Council Members: Warren Levy, Robert Taborsak, Irving Fox, John Priola, John Esposito

Mr. Johnston, Board Chairperson, called the meeting to order at 6:10 p.m, gave a brief overview of the workshop agenda, and turned the meeting over to Mr. Martino.

Mr. Martino thanked the City Council Members for attending the workshop and distributed a power point presentation to attendees. He gave brief overview of the Board's mission. Children are our first priority and we hold high expectations and accountability for all. The state budget concerns are ongoing. The district received cuts mid-session after adopting its budget. The Alliance Grant was reduced by \$250,000. The Priority School District Grant was reduced by \$350,000. The Teacher Mentoring, which was mandated by the state, was reduced by \$40,000. The district is still required to run the program. Just recently announced were additional cuts of \$100,000 from the Priority School District Grant and \$150,000 from the Magnet School Grant. The Governor's proposed 2-year budget held \$975,000 in educational aid. The Board has made efforts in Budget Cost Containment with regards to creation of low incident school based special education program, reallocation of substitute teacher resources to better impact instruction, the transportation system was switched to all propane fleet, lighting and heating upgrades, consolidation of purchases, and state advocacy. Enrollment trend in Danbury continues to move up, while most of the state and surrounding schools are declining. Current enrollment is at 11,451. A study by Milone & MacBroom shows projected enrollment increase. Data by subgroups show growth in English Language Learners (26.2%), Special Education (12.7%) and Free and Reduced-Priced Lunch (58.1%). Related to enrollment growth, the budget includes additional 5 FTE's in teachers and 3 FTE's in custodians for the high school expansion. Current custodian per square footage at the high school is 40,000, while the industry is at 18,000. The new addition is 60,000 square feet. The budget includes 2 new FTE's for the new portable classrooms at Westside Middle School; Special Education teachers, including Speech and Language for continued growth in caseloads; a Drug and Alcohol Specialist to service high-needs students; restoration of math and literacy coaches and paraprofessionals that were cut from last year's budget. The overall health insurance renewal is 3.5%. Partnering with the city has been beneficial to cost control. Total budget increase is \$7MM; Operational Budget increase is \$4.4MM; Enrollment Growth is \$2.6.

Mr. Martino turned the meeting back to Chairperson, Mr. Johnston, who opened the meeting for discussion by Board and City Council Members. Topics discussed were as follows:

- Enrollment growth has been 1 – 1 ½ % per year. Specific areas of growth are Old Ridgebury Road and downtown. The additional classrooms at Westside Middle School will alleviate growth at the two other middles schools with possible 62 – 63% state reimbursement.
- Varying class sizes may be above or below guidelines with the reduction of faculty and staff. There are challenges with high school classes being offered. There is an increase in SPED referral rates.
- A frozen ECS formula has placed a burden on the city. There has been a good working relationship with the city and the board and administration. Recent publicity may be attributed to city's growth. There are only 4 or 5 towns in the state that are growing. The district is working with legislators and will testify to the state.

- Distance learning was suggested as a cost saving, as well as other shared services, such as IT and personnel. The district has a unionized IT department and is understaffed in other departments. A 2015 Blum Shapiro report was referenced and considered. There are shared services where possible.
- The city has also experienced reduction in state funds and is slated to lose \$2MM in FY19. The city increases education funding each year. School buildings represent \$3.5MM on the City Budget.
- Danbury's per pupil expenditure is the least in the state and will continue to decline as enrollment grows. This includes city contributions and services, as it is reported to the state on the ED001. The per pupil spend for Special Education is about 4 times more. More for outplaced students.
- It was suggested that all stakeholders become organized to advocate at the state level. Many people, not only a few, are needed to effect change on a unified front. Community leaders should take the lead in rallying support.
- The lobbyist provides an avenue of communication and services in Hartford. He has helped to provide bill tracking. The cost is shared between the Board and City.
- The city's budget has been increasing at a higher rate than the board's budget. Administration cost per pupil is 30% less than the state average. There have been cuts made to tutors, paraprofessionals and administration.
- Local superintendents have met to discuss regionalization of support, space and transportation. There has been no discussion of regional governance.
- Grant money is being used to fill gaps and extend programs. All elementary schools, except for one, are Title 1.
- Credit recovery has been offered at the high school for the past 6 years, where students who are close to receiving a credit are provided online learning to avoid having to retake the course.
- Of the \$8.4MM Alliance Grant, about \$300,000 goes toward salary increases. There are 82 FTE's, including all-day kindergarten and ELL teachers, in the grant.
- The budget includes an additional 2 Special Education teachers at the high school. There are an additional 30 Special Education students expected to matriculate into the Freshmen Academy, bringing the total number of SPED students to 130 at the high school.
- Twenty-two percent of the current budget is for SPED, serving just under 1,500 students. In-district programming has been beneficial. Out-of-district placements remain low at about 45 students. There are two DCF Group Homes in Danbury and "No-Nexus" child education costs fall under the district and frequently come with Special Education and outplacement costs throughout the year. The district must also assume educational responsibility for any student who is placed in a youth detention or mental health facility.
- There is a consultant currently reviewing the transportation tiered structure for a more time- and cost-efficient method.
- Ingersol Auto provides laptops each year for the past several years for the high school. Teachers are using Donors Choose for additional technology.
- The Magnet School Grant has been reduced over the past few years. Enrollment from outer districts has also declined. It still represents \$1.7MM in revenue for the district.

Mrs. Cooper moved, seconded by Mr. Jannelli, to adjourn the February 21 Board Workshop. The motion passed and the meeting adjourned at 7:25 p.m.

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Rachel Chaleski, Secretary

(meeting was videotaped)