

Board of Education Ellington, Connecticut

February 10, 2021

A special virtual meeting of the Ellington Board of Education was held on Wednesday, February 10, 2021, at 6:00 p.m. via Google Meet.

Present were: Mr. Blanchette, Purcaro and Young; Ms. Dzen, Picard-Wambolt, Nord, Kupferschmid, Underwood, Mullin, Socha and Dr. Scott Nicol, Superintendent of Schools.

Administration present were: Mr. John Collins, Director of Technology; Mr. Brian Hendrickson, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction; Mr. Brian Greenleaf, Director of Finance and Operations; and Dr. Kristy LaPorte, Director of Special Services.

Also in attendance: Ms. Jennifer Brown, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent/Human Resources Coordinator.

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Mr. Purcaro, Chairman.

Mr. Purcaro thanked the team for attending the meeting. This is a follow up meeting to our previous budget meetings, lots of ground to cover with the hope tonight that we will be passing our budget.

AGENDA

PUBLIC COMMENT

Michele Murray, EAA President

Dear Mr. Purcaro and Members of the Board of Education:

As president of the Ellington Administrators' Association, I recognize that the budget process is complicated as you work to develop the most financially responsible budget. As an administrator group our role is to advocate for the needs of our students and our teachers. We want to ensure that the adopted budget provides teachers with the necessary resources to support high quality teaching and learning.

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Last week the administrators attended the BOE meeting and listened as you discussed recommendations to decrease certain accounts, such as the professional development budget by 10%. Also discussed were budgets such as the program supply budgets for each school. While we know you are carefully considering all aspects of the budget, as a group we were concerned that these budget items would be cut without an understanding of the impact these cuts would have on the teachers and students of Ellington.

We began the budget process this year with conversations between administrators and teachers who shared with you how the budget is developed each year. Many of the accounts you recommended cutting are the same accounts that teachers thoughtfully helped to develop as they plan for next year. These accounts are not budgeted based on what was spent two years ago but rather planned with what the needs are for next year. Cutting the professional development budget reduces the ability for teachers to participate in the learning they need to implement new technology, improve their instruction and better support students. Some of the planned uses for the professional development budget are directly connected to the Board of Education's focus on improving math scores, reading achievement, and supporting the social emotional learning needs of our students. In addition to impacting our teachers' classroom practices, cutting the professional development budget also limits progress on developing, revising, and writing curriculum.

While the Board of Education did not recommend cutting the program supply budget by 10% last week, it was stated at the meeting that this may be further discussed with a possible reduction of 5%. These cuts would directly reduce the supply budgets in our schools, which would include the science resources, math resources, language arts resources, art resources, STEM resources, and technology resources our teachers have requested to improve or provide programming for next year. Without access to the necessary resources and professional development, it becomes harder for teachers to enrich the curriculum with the right tools and current best practices.

On behalf of the administrators, we respectfully ask you to consider not recommending any cuts to the program supply or professional development budgets as these cuts will have a direct impact on the teaching and learning we provide for next year. I appreciate your time and know you are working hard to develop a fiscally responsible budget to move forward to the Board of Finance.

Theresa Johnson, 2nd Grade Teacher, Crystal Lake School

Dear Board of Education Members and Administrators,

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I would like to take this opportunity to speak on behalf of teachers in support of both keeping media specialists in their current positions and keeping the art position.

I have been an Elementary School Teacher in Ellington for 29 years and a resident of Ellington for almost that same amount of time. I have seen lots and lots of change in my career and thus feel I can speak honestly and authentically about media specialists.

Over the course of my career the special teachers have often been put at risk during very trying budgetary times. These teachers make a phenomenal impact on the entire student population, yet they often are seen as a way to make fiscal changes. It takes a very long time to ever regain these valued teaching positions once they are lost as mentioned by Steve Bernard.

So, I just wanted to share the important work that I know our media specialist does at CLS. To let you know the value and importance of how she touches the lives of children each and every opportunity that she has. What I am about to share is not a comprehensive list, but it will give you a true picture of her impact.

- Krista spends countless hours, often of her own personal time, researching and ultimately purchasing high quality literature to fill the shelves in our beautiful library and to spark interest and joy of reading for students of all grades
- She showcases new, as well as seasoned authors, to expose children to authentic authors and literature
- She consults with teachers on the needs of books to complement and support units of study across the curriculum and the grades
- She consults with teachers on content area projects and coordinates teaching necessary research skills into her library lessons to support student work
- She runs book clubs to support enrichment for our higher readers
- She runs the Nutmeg State Book and Summer Reading programs
- She researches and secures author visits for our school to ensure realistic experiences for students
- She consistently investigates new technology such as bots and Breakout EDU's to integrate into the library in order to support STEM and Makerspace initiatives
- and Krista provides enrichment and has high academic standards for all students. One way she demonstrates this is by teaching coding during her library lessons.

It is clear from the stated examples the important work the media specialist does to support both the children and teachers of our school. The level of expertise, knowledge, and support she provides for our school community can not be

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replicated or replaced. This has been glaringly evident during this time of Covid as the teachers at CLS have lost at least 50% of our library and media specialist time.

Thank you for allowing me to speak and provide a teacher's perspective on how the loss of the media specialists due to fiscal difficulties would ultimately have a far reaching impact for both students and teachers.

Continued Discussion and Possible Action on 2021-2022 Budget

Mr. Greenleaf provided a recap of where we left off from the last meeting, the proposed budget was reduced by \$238,079 which brought the increase from 3.38% down to 2.79%. (9:55)

Dr. Nicol stated that the administration team's endeavor to put the Board of Education in a place to make the most informed decision. He shared a memo from Mr. Greenleaf with the Board earlier in the day that overviewed the cuts that were made at the last meeting as well as suggestions from the administration and they are here to answer any questions they may have.

Ms. Nord asked about Dan Spada's position and if he will be going to the elementary level to teach gifted and talented. Will his current position be replaced? Dr. Nicol stated the recommendations, that have not been acted upon, including the cut of the 1.6 Library Media Specialist and the increase of the .5 FTE for talented and gifted. Mr. Spada's position at the secondary level would be reallocated to the elementary level with .5 of his position consisting of Technology Integration and .5 Gifted and Talented.

Ms. Nord also had a question in regards to the Choice budget, she was looking for details on the 2020-2021 budget. Mr. Greenleaf stated that 2020-2021 looks very similar to 2021-2022, only difference is the \$65,000 for the minority teacher in residence.

Ms. Mullin stated that she is comfortable with the percentage increase where it is now and worries that any more cuts could be making cuts to critical programming.

Dr. Young inquired into the status of the Library Media Specialists and if someone needs to make a motion. Ms. Nord stated that it was discussed at the Finance committee but no recommendation was made.

Ms. Picard-Wambolt would like to consider putting the \$10,000 back into the budget that they cut from the professional development line last week. She feels strongly about

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keeping the money in for professional development, it is important for students and teachers.

Move that the Board of Education reinstate the \$10,100 that was removed from line 330, Professional Development Services.

1st. K. Picard Wambolt

2nd. J. Mullin

VOTE: Unanimous. The motion passed.

Ms. Mullin asked for an update on the budget numbers with that money added back in. Mr. Greenleaf stated that brings the reduction to \$227,969 and an increase of 2.81%.

Mr. Purcaro asked for an update on the insurance numbers. Mr. Greenleaf stated that they invited finalists back and are waiting on their proposals.

Ms. Dzen would like to revisit the media specialist positions, they were informed that no one would be dismissed, it is a reorganization and told by administration that it is doable.

Move that the Board of Education eliminates the 1.6 FTE Media Specialist positions.

1st. J. Dzen

2nd. K. Picard-Wambolt

VOTE: Ayes: Blanchette, Dzen, Kupferschmid, Mullin, Picard-Wambolt, Socha and Young. Nays: Nord and Underwood. The motion passed.

With that motion, Mr. Greenleaf stated that the reduction of \$125,503 was added to make the total reduction \$353,472 and the percent increase to 2.51%.

Move that the Board of Education adopt a budget for the 2021-2022 fiscal year of \$41,633,751 which will be an increase of \$1,017,715 or a 2.51% increase to the current budget.

1st. M. Young

2nd. J. Mullin

VOTE: Ayes: Blanchette, Dzen, Kupferschmid, Mullin, Picard-Wambolt, Socha, Underwood and Young. Nays: Nord.

A motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 7:40 p.m.

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1st. K. Picard-Wambolt

2nd. K. Socha

VOTE: Unanimous. The motion passed.

Respectfully submitted,

Kris Picard Wambolt
Secretary