

DANBURY BOARD OF EDUCATION WORKSHOP MEETING MINUTES

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 25, 2012 – 5:30 PM
Rogers Park Middle School - Cafeteria

Present: Eileen Alberts, Shirley Chilian, Gladys Cooper, Gary Falkenthal, Annrose Fluskey-Lattin, Richard Hawley, Richard Jannelli, Kathleen Molinaro, Sandy Steichen, Robert Taborsak, Phyllis Tranzillo; Drs. William Glass and Sal Pascarella, Ed Arum and Kim Thompson from Administration

Absent: None

CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Gladys Cooper called the meeting to order at 5:53 p.m. and those assembled recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

DISCUSSION

2012-2013 Budget

S. Pascarella distributed two handouts, one with regard to budget reductions for the 2012-2013 year, and the other showing the impact of the 2011-2012 budget reduction on students, families and staff as of this date. He thanked E. Arum for all his hard work with regard to the savings we incurred from CIGNA. S. Pascarella told the Board that as of today's date, it looks like our budget needs have gone from \$1.7 million to \$1.64 million. He talked about all the items listed in the handouts and explained each one. He told the Board there are more retirees than they thought so this is saving the district some money also. His suggestion is that we remove the items that had a value added, which would go to the special grant from the City. He feels there would be a budget offset from this year from our savings account together with the CIGNA savings of \$770,000. Also, there is a possibility of saving \$150,000 if we do not have to add two buses. We could save off of our expenses with regard to the interns that we have been using for subs of about \$100,000. The computer lease is the money we have in here to lease. The City has indicated to us that they would be willing to fund a bond to do that. The big difference is Head Start. The initial proposal was \$195,000. S. Pascarella said that over the next three to five years, he feels we can give about \$585,000 to a new model of funding, some local contribution with new grants, to minimize the impact of the budget. J. Maloney has indicated that over the next few years, we could look at trying to increase the amount of money that would come out of our operational budget. Being that we were able to get that added money from the insurance company, and the fact that we have that many more people that are retiring, S. Pascarella suggests that the cut to Head Start only be at \$50,000. In addition, he has removed the "pay to participate" across the board because he feels the problems with collecting, etc., are not worth it. This still maintains the teacher ratio when we apply for the \$1.7 million dollars, and one thing that he was skeptical about, is that if in fact there is an issue with the \$1.7 million dollars, the City would assist us in making us whole. When you put that all together working collaboratively, he feels we can meet our budget obligations by making these cuts and still keeping our programs whole. The beauty of this is that if we get the \$1.7 million and we start building on our S.I.O.P. (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol), the readiness program, the Head Start program, with the full day kindergarten and some increasing bilingual programs and some of our regular programs at the high school, we will really start impacting our instructional gap.

R. Jannelli thanked Administration and E. Arum for the job he did with the insurance, and E. Arum confirmed that it is a locked -in number. He asked if the \$160,000 that we have is contingent upon being passed at a referendum. E. Arum replied that it is not known if it will go to referendum. It is a six-year plan at \$500,000 per year. R. Jannelli feels that collectively we have to get together with the business people to have them understand what we are doing in Danbury and understand the value of education. Also they need to know what our students mean to them and have them be a part of the educational process. He is afraid that next year we may be back with the same 10% gain with the insurance company when we negotiate and feels we have to do something to look at the revenue side. We need to continue to make sure there is money coming in and not always continuing to cut. Once we continue the cut, we will get to a point of diminishing

returns. He thinks we should get together with the different stake holders in the City to try to make our educational system stronger and to make them more aware of the challenges we are faced with each year.

R. Taborsak is looking at supplementing Head Start by grants. He asked if there is enough money to keep the program running. He concurs with R. Jannelli in that we may be in the same situation next year. S. Pascarella said that the Board needs to come around their own philosophical view about the importance of our programming beyond the norm. He said that if we have access to \$1.7 million dollars and we were to remove this program, you would not access the \$1.7, because it is a major strategy to close the achievement gap. As we apply for grants to make us eligible, we are doing things in Danbury that makes us much more attractive to receive them. Operationally, if, in fact, the reform moves forward from the Governor's office, there are added seats for readiness programs because of the interest of the legislators and the Governor to have universal pre-school for all students, and the cut-off is that you have a 40% free and reduced lunch count. A few years ago, we did not qualify, but we now qualify. So we have the possibility of accessing two or three more classrooms. S. Pascarella said that if he starts buttressing that up to Head Start, we start decreasing the amount of money we have, while we keep adding the number of kids to close the achievement gap. He feels it should be our goal to actively try to get grants to keep the program running. R. Taborsak feels it is very important to have the early education program at Head Start, but does not want this to come up again in the future. S. Pascarella said if we put in a conditional grant to close the achievement gap, you cannot turn around and say you are going to rescind it. It is a five-year commitment. This is why he feels the Board needs to have a discussion on this.

S. Pascarella asked J. Maloney if he thought that the district had a chance to receive some grants to try to help us. J. Maloney feels the answer is yes. There are two different aspects of it. One is that the \$1.7 million dollars may turn into \$1.75 million dollars and we would like to talk about that and then we could fully restore the Head Start cut, if at all possible. The legislation is still being worked on and there are Head Start proponents at the Capitol who are trying to make sure that the legislation works well with Head Start. Item number two is the school readiness program. The Governor proposed \$500,000, the last he heard the legislature was looking at about \$900,000. That number is not fixed because the bill is not resolved yet. If there were more school readiness slots that were available, that certainly would help. There is a big difference between school readiness and Head Start. School readiness is the education component and Head Start is the education component and the family development component. We would use school readiness slots to substitute for what amounts to Head Start slots. That would have to be negotiated with the regional office in Boston. In effect, the Head Start program does more than the school readiness program does and the Boston Head Start Office would have to part of that conversation. J. Maloney agrees with S. Pascarella's analysis that it is possible to support the Head Start program with grants, but it is not entirely blue sky.

S. Steichen has difficulties with this because she does not think we can look at this and look at the rest of our schools and say that this is a perfect world. She feels if we do not have a plan in place for Head Start to be more self-sufficient, it will continue to use our local funds that take away the funding for our K – 12. She said we have middle school students and high school students who have multiple study halls and she feels we need to focus on our needs. She would like to have a short-term and long-term plan of our relationship with Head Start and how we will proceed in the future. S. Chilian agrees with S. Steichen. She thinks total proponents of the program as well as those who may have some question relative to before and after are going to end up on the same page on this Board. She asked J. Maloney what the \$50,000 is going to do to the Head Start program next year. He feels if that is what goes forward, it is a \$50,000 cut on the Board's side of the budget. Since all the Board funds is personnel, there will be a reduction in personnel. We need to have a discussion about how that happens. There are a variety of ways we can do this. We have asked to be consulted about how it will be done, but it is ultimately the Board's decision. Head Start's obligation is to continue to run the program. Head Start would have to come up with that \$50,000 and cut on the parent component side of the program. J. Maloney said there will be no increase in state or federal funds and that Head Start is a state, federal and local program.

S. Steichen said according to the information she has, expenditures in the 2009/10 budget versus the 2011/12 budget, benefits have gone up from \$332,000 to \$785,000. J. Maloney said he cannot respond because those numbers are under the Board's control. R. Hawley said it seems as though the federal and state funding for Head Start has been stagnant over the past five years. He asks what steps have been taken to get more. J. Maloney said the Board of Ed's funding has been stagnant. The increases have come by the increases in the Board's costs. On the Head Start side of the budget, they have done everything they can by eliminating positions, making administrative changes, and moved more of the administrative costs to other programs. He said they have found ways of negotiating their way through what amounts to steady funding with no increases, but increases in costs. R. Hawley asked that as a federal, state, and locally funded program, why does a

kindergarten student have 22 students per class, yet Head Start is mandated to have 10, which is true for all early pre-school programs. J. Maloney said that Head Start is mandated at 10 students per staff person; however, the answer is age difference. Early Head Start is mandated one staff person for four students, because you cannot take care of 10 students in diapers, etc. The Board of Ed does not put any money into Early Head Start. The Board makes space available but that is not part of the budget discussion. R. Hawley suggests an adjustment be made to the 1 to 10 ratio.

Annrose Fluskey-Lattin asks S. Pascarella about the legal-sized document which was distributed with regard to the impact of the 2011-2012 budget reduction. The history states that last year all the paraprofessionals were cut. She would like to know how many staff members were cut from the kindergarten classrooms. K. Thompson said that it was approximately 16. Her question is what was S. Pascarella's thinking process when he decided to fund back from the original budget reductions on April 11, which was Head Start being reduced by \$195,000, and now it is being reduced by \$50,000, when you still have kindergarten classrooms with 20 to 22 students and still without a paraprofessional. Why did you choose that over putting some paraprofessionals back into the kindergarten classrooms? S. Pascarella said the decision was made regarding the kindergarten aides with the administrators present. A decision was made a few years ago to reduce the aides. Two years before, we had two literacy individuals, and we reduced to one. Two years later, we started looking at areas we had to reduce that were crucial and that was one of the recommendations before the Board, either we reduce full-day kindergarten to half day and keep the aides, or we go the other way. We decided to keep the full-day kindergarten and reduce the aides. S. Pascarella met with the administrators with regard to the before and after school programs in terms of where we would have to look at possible reductions. Their feeling at that time was, if, in fact, we are going to have to further reduce our elementary resources, then the concern became the value added that Head Start gives us vs. us having to go back to maybe universal half-day kindergarten, maybe reducing some of our instructional aides, literacy people, some of our math people. S. Pascarella said rather than do that, he put a recommendation on the table. Since the conditional funding mechanism is operationalized by the Governor who states clearly that if you are going to use this funding to add value to our program to close the achievement gap, one of the criteria that he will look at to approve the \$1.7 million dollars is class size reduction, which would be the added people that we have in there for the enrollment, and secondly, to build onto our gap closing activities of pre-school. Now we have a plan for full-day kindergarten. It builds on our readiness program and it builds on our Early Head Start. S. Pascarella said it just made sense that in order to put us in the best position to do what is right for our kids, we ought to move down that direction.

Annrose Fluskey-Lattin asks that if we are trying to close the achievement gap and reduce class size, would not an aide in a kindergarten classroom reduce class size, thus closing the achievement gap? S. Pascarella replied by saying that when there was an aide in the classroom, it typically was the main teacher and an aide, so it was two with twenty-two students. It did not reduce size; it just reduced the dependency on the teacher to perform other functions. S. Pascarella said the research was explicit that the teacher was more effective than having the aide present, and still when we presented it to the Board, we presented two options. The option the Board selected was to reduce the aides.

R. Hawley spoke on transitioning to full-day kindergarten within a three-year period. He said it is estimated that 151 students will be added for 2012-2013 in terms of full-day kindergarten. E. Arum said if you took March 1 numbers, it is 165 children. R. Hawley asked if that is all budgeted and salaried and expensed within this existing budget. E. Arum said it is tied into the \$1.7 million dollars.

S. Chilian would like to know what the consultant has done to help. E. Arum said he and the consultant both worked hard and they have been in constant contact. They have met with CIGNA at least five times. He also said that the State has come down and they went out to bid with Blue Cross. He said the fiduciary responsibility to the people of Danbury has been done. S. Chilian said it is her understanding that the State plan was sent out by the Comptroller directly to the Superintendent, and the Superintendent was to amass the information and directly return it to the Comptroller's office. She would like to know if our consultant was involved in the State process of ascertaining what the cost would be to us, and the answer was yes. E. Arum said they work together. The quote came from the Comptroller's office.

P. Tranzillo asked about value added. She would like to know what is in the value added. She said she had a list of all the items that were going to be cut but her list added up to \$776,000, and we are doing \$690,000. S. Pascarella said the term is simply used because it is going to enhance the programs that we have. He referred to the second page of his handout and said those items are the ones that he wants to move forward. He has asked Dr. Glass to develop a detailed plan that would encompass all of the \$1.7 million dollars plus some other program that we are looking at. What is exact in terms of the budget would be what is on the first page of the handout in terms of reduction to get down to the \$4.6 million dollars. If

you look at Page 2, we know that all-day kindergarten will be roughly around \$350,000, and S. Pascarella explained the items on Page 2 in detail. P. Tranzillo said she is confused because in the past the Board worked with a value added list and it is not included in any of the documentation that was handed out this evening. E. Arum said the items on that list are out. One of the items was the reduction of a part-time nurse, and E. Arum said they are working with our Medicaid funding with IEP Direct, and we will probably be able to fund that under Medicaid. S. Pascarella will update the list for the Board.

G. Falkenthal said that he read an article in *The News Times* about Senate Bill 24. S. Pascarella said that it is not dead. The Governor spoke today where he has indicated how he feels about the budget. He will be distributing a handout at the Board Meeting about the differences between the original senate bill and the committee version of it. There is no question that Connecticut is at a tipping point. We have the largest achievement gap. S. Pascarella said it is not going to happen the way the Governor has laid out the blueprint and it is not going to happen the way the legislators have laid out the blueprint. He just wrote our legislators yesterday with a proposal. It will be a negotiated budget going forward.

Annrose Fluskey-Lattin said that under the value added, S. Pascarella mentioned Power School. It is her impression that it is a state mandate. E. Arum said it is Naviance, a software package, and we are buying it out of this year's budget. S. Pascarella said that Naviance means that every student has to have an individualized plan starting in sixth grade. We are doing Power School but we are doing it out of some expenditures from this year. We do need to report that data. S. Pascarella reminds the Board that every teacher in every grade has got to be reported to the Commissioner. E. Arum said we might have to rearrange personnel to do it.

S. Steichen asks if the budget reflects positions that have not been filled. E. Arum said that with regard to the retirement, we use salaries because they are all taking benefits. We may hire someone who only needs a single policy and not family, so we save some money, but we don't know that now. So the benefits are left in. We just move out the salary. K. Thompson said that teaching classroom positions are presumably full either with a long term sub or by a current employee. So all of those moved forward in the budget when we talk about moving everything forward and then we have allotted a certain number of positions to accommodate the enrollment increase for next year. Those pieces are all firmly in the budget.

R. Jannelli asked E. Arum if the savings that was negotiated for the health insurance helps the City. Are they able to get a benefit? E. Arum said that we have a separate plan from the City so they have to negotiate for themselves.

S. Steichen asked if S. Pascarella thought about reinstating any of the electives at the high school and middle school levels. S. Pascarella said we have not added in that area. He said we let elective areas move ahead even though there were not enough kids to qualify for the classes. Dr. Glass said this is not the same school system we had four years ago. We have been seriously hurt. He stated issues where they have tried to salvage things that have fallen through the cracks. In every situation, we try to do the best with what we have.

Annrose Fluskey-Lattin asked J. Maloney if there is anything that he could do to increase the funding from the State. If the local budget does not support Head Start, is there a place for J. Maloney to go to pick up the pieces? J. Maloney said they get the same amount of money that everyone else gets from the state and federal government. The City has done a great job supporting Head Start. The local program has had its ups and down. The State is not looking to put more money in the Head Start program. The SB24 is under negotiations. We are hoping that there might be some language that might be supportive of Head Start. The most important thing that can be done at the State level is to change the ECS formula so that Danbury gets its fair share. G. Falkenthal asked J. Maloney about all money going to personnel and J. Maloney explained the funding that the Board gives and also the funding that he received from the State.

S. Steichen asked about the MREC. She noticed in the budget that it has gone down considerably. She asks what the building is used for. S. Pascarella explained that Head Start is located there plus some of our programs for special education. She asked about the other building in Mill Ridge, the former administrative offices. S. Pascarella said we were able to move some people in there to make space at our Literacy Center. K. Thompson said the building is also used for storing technology equipment. She would like to know how this is delineated in the budget by line item. Dr. Glass said that building is about the size of the cafeteria at Rogers Park Middle School. It houses four offices on one side. On the other side, it houses five offices, and then there is a center area that is open for four secretaries. The technology is housed in a safe and it is a walk-in safe and we keep the laptops there. There are four people in the tech leader's office. Dr. Glass said we looked at moving it out and we talked to an architect who said we could probably get three classrooms or it could be

turned into a media center, and we could take the media center in the building and repurpose that. The other part is that where we had increased enrollment at the high school, we took the central office staff, we downsized it by about 50%, and the people that were left, we took them out of the high school and turned those back into classrooms. Then we took the remaining few people at Osborne Street and put them over at CRC as well. If we had a second floor on Beaver Brook or if we took the Board room and chopped it up into cubicles, we could put them there. Those are the kinds of things we are thinking about.

S. Pascarella said the budget is on the agenda for the next Board meeting for discussion.

E. Alberts said there is a lot of publicity about Head Start being ineffective after a certain period of time. Dr. Glass said there have been a lot of letters to the editor not only in Danbury but in other places. When economic times get tough, the question then comes up. Some of the things people hear is that Head Start starts off positively and then fizzles out by the middle of elementary school. There is some truth to that, but there is a fallacy with that as well. Most of the research studies say that Head Start makes a significant difference as long as it is maintained. This means if you have kids with a 1 to 10 ratio, if you have a full-day program, if you have parental support, and then they come into a full-day kindergarten program, there are paraprofessionals, there is ample materials, there is active parent engagement, and then it continues on through first grade, second grade, third grade, it stays. The attraction stays. If the kids have this rich program, and then they come in to a universal half-day kindergarten program, without paraprofessionals, and you have 22 or 23 kids in a room, no ample resources, you are going to lose the momentum you picked up.

ADJOURNMENT

K. Molinaro moved, seconded by R. Taborsak that the Board of Education adjourn its April 25, 2012 Workshop Meeting.

The motion carried unanimously at 7:19 p.m.

Richard Hawley, Secretary