



NEW HAVEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS
NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT

Minutes –Board of Education Special Meeting – February 19, 2020

The meeting was called to order at 4:08 p.m. by Mr. Y. Rivera, President. The meeting was held in the 2nd floor Board Room at 54 Meadow St., New Haven, Connecticut.

Present: Ms. Y. Rivera, President; Mr. M. Wilcox, Vice-President; Dr. E. Joyner, Secretary; Mr. D. Goldson, Dr. T. Jackson-McArthur, Mayor J. Elicker, Mr. Larry Conaway, Ms. L. Arouna

Absent: Dr. T. Jackson- McArthur, Ms. L. Arouna, Mr. N. Rivera

Mr. Conaway led the assembly in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Dr. Tracey welcomed everyone and commented that as you are aware we have been working on this budget simultaneously; proposed budget, current budget, mitigation strategies, etc. This evening we want to spend some time getting your input as well as sharing our thinking around our mitigation efforts. She publically thanked Mr. Goldson, for supporting us and Mr. Wilcox for attending meetings. We have more meetings coming up where we will share the budget ideas that we have and make the public aware that we are in a deficit and that we have been flat funded for several years.

Dr. Tracey commented that the State and the Mayor’s office have been helping out; we are trying to fulfill our responsibilities and to make the public aware of where we stand in an effort to be transparent. Mr. Penn will be leading us through this discussion and if you have questions ask them because that is the purpose of this meeting.

Mr. Penn explained the two packets that were distributed. He remarked that the initial projection for the 2020-2021 FY budget, is a request for \$199,019,490, a difference of \$10,800,793 and a 5.73% increase. This is a “turn the lights” on budget. It doesn’t include new resources or new programs and we would start the 2021 school year with what we have right now.

Mr. Penn remarked that today we will spend time on the proposed new spends and the mitigation strategies that are in it. Both of these will be integral to the final number that we come in with on Monday. He reminded the public that on Monday, February 24th, the Board of Ed votes on the budget. We will then turn our information over to the Finance Department at the Mayor’s Office to make sure they have everything they need to turn it over to the Board of Alders by March 1st.

Mr. Penn explained the Alliance Grant and its flexibilities. He commented that this grant can be used for a grant writer, the K5 math curriculum, building maintenance and a director of facilities. This leaves us with an increase of \$498,000 instead of the \$1.7 million that was proposed. As an executive team we feel there is value to all of these, given the conditions of the schools and all of the things we were talking about particularly the grant writer that can create more revenue moving forward.



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In response to a question by Mr. Goldson, Mr. Penn commented that we have a maintenance firm Go To, that provides oversight to the custodial work that we do. We have a firm that does the regular cleaning for the buildings but we do not have someone who can prioritize the capital expenditures that we need to maintain the infrastructure of the buildings. Mr. Penn called on Mr. Pinto who provided more detailed information on this inquiry. Mr. Goldson wanted to know if we have already someone doing custodial work, why we would have to hire someone else. Mr. Pinto explained in detail. Mr. Goldson commented that he needs more information on this because he doesn't understand. He went on in detail.

Dr. Joyner commented that he can see a need for this position, because what Go-To does is mainly manage personnel. What Mr. Penn and Mr. Pinto are talking about is someone who has technical engineering abilities that reports directly to our staff and can look at the current state of our buildings and has the technical expertise to talk to vendors and can also work to craft a plan that preventive maintenance can save us money. Dr. Joyner continued.

Mr. Wilcox had some questions and Mr. Pinto and Mr. Penn answered him in detail. The discussion continued at length.

Mr. Goldson initiated a discussion around raises for paraprofessionals and commented that he would argue that their raises go up considerably. He commented that he would suggest that we increase this proposed new spending to include paraprofessionals. Dr. Tracey noted that she feels it is not appropriate to discuss that at this juncture because it is still in negotiation. She continued to explain.

A discussion ensued. President Rivera told Mr. Goldson that it would be inappropriate for us to discuss this issue at this time.

Mr. Conaway asked for some clarity on the facilities plan and Mr. Penn explained in detail.

Mr. Penn continued and commented that he was asked to present a budget that was a truthful one, which would reflect a true cost to open the doors next year. The first thing is to shrink certified staff through attrition and the second would be to reduce the number of buses, and to more aggressively reduce management turnover. If you think about outgoing salaries higher vs. incoming, there is an opportunity for us to save between \$3,000 and \$5,000 per hire, and he continued to explain.

Mr. Penn then talked about furlough days and the amount that could be reduced affecting the general fund which would be about \$530K per day. Worker's compensation claims could reduce our substitute costs by \$170K. Retirement incentives are another way to reduce this budget. Approximately 174 teachers qualify for full retirement as defined by the



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Teachers Retirement Board (TRB) and we could realize a potential savings of \$10,000 to \$15,000 per teacher. He explained in detail.

Mr. Penn commented that they have also seen opportunities to consolidate facilities and there are a number of proposals from the budget mitigation committee. We also talked about increasing new streams of revenue. All three of these strategies would add value but we just might not have time to do them by the 2021 school year.

In summing up, Mr. Penn remarked if we were to add together all three strategies, it would come somewhere between \$5.8 million to \$7.2 million, the midpoint would be \$6.5 million. His recommendation from the team is to discount it to \$6 million and he explained in detail. He suggested that we should move forward with this.

Mayor Elicker asked if he is doing some of this work now. Mr. Penn noted the strategies that they are using, and mentioned there are other mitigation strategies that they are working on. Mayor Elicker asked if the item relating to the 2021 budget would help for a smoother transition, if we are doing some of these things now. He asked if there are proactive measures that the Board can help support him with to reduce that deficit. Mr. Penn commented that he would like to give that more thought and discuss it with his team.

Dr. Joyner remarked that one of the things that concern him about the certified positions is that we have self-certified teachers and he hopes that is taken into account and he explained. Dr. Joyner also discussed the bus routes causing families and children a lot of problems. Mr. Penn told Dr. Joyner that there is also an execution risk in this.

Mr. Goldson expressed some of his concerns. Mr. Penn said that they will be discussing some of his concerns in Finance & Operations.

Mayor Elicker remarked that as Mr. Penn knows we have major problems on the City side with our budget and he appreciates the earnest effort he is making on the Board of Education side to make it easier for the City side to acknowledge the problem we have in balancing this budget.

Mr. Wilcox asked two questions; about the potential strategies on page 4 and something that you have discussed with this administrative team. Mr. Penn said he was correct. Mr. Penn explained further. Mr. Penn commented that he would not want to move forward with a plan and then pull the plug on it because it would leave us in a worse position to start the year; we will have a budget that doesn't reflect any of these things. This is as much a litmus test of the Board's appetite to execute on these moving forward. Mr. Penn remarked he feels some of these should be done. As the Mayor has said publically and then again tonight, the city is in a tough spot too. And as responsible stewards of the city's capital there is a need, on our part, to mitigate that risk to the city. Mr. Penn stated that during his



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interview process he made a comment saying, “there is going to be pain no matter what we do”, and that is where we are now. He went on to explain.

Mr. Goldson asked about shrinking staff positions and wanted to know if it includes administrators, classroom teachers, and guidance counselors. Mr. Penn remarked all certified teachers are included. In the Mayor’s transition report he made it clear, through his staff, that he would like to see increases in library media specialists, guidance counselors and early childhood. Dr. Tracey remarked that we have put some of those positions into the Alliance grant. Ms. Typhanie Jackson explained to Mr. Goldson and answered his questions in detail.

Dr. Tracey repeated that they have reinstated some positions into the Alliance grant and some of our schools have expressed that they would like to have STEM labs rather than libraries.

Dr. Joyner said he just wanted Mr. Penn to feel good about the hard work he put into this as well as the time he spent after hours up in Hartford. It brings Frank Altieri to mind who was a phenomenal CFO from the State. Dr. Joyner went on to say that we are going to have to count on the community to join us to try to educate these kids. He thanked Mr. Penn for everything he is doing.

Mr. Goldson went back to question some other points that were in the budget. He particularly asked about the consolidation of buildings and what it meant. He and Mr. Penn had a discussion on this.

Mr. Goldson wanted to know what our process is going to be on Monday for working on and improving this budget. He doesn’t want there to be any confusion. He may have some suggestions and/or amendments and, for the record, he just wants to make sure it’s allowed for him to make amendments relevant to this budget as a Board member.

Mrs. Rivera remarked that the point of this meeting was to discuss the budget here today so that on Monday we would be ready to vote it up or down.

Mr. Goldson commented that he is going through this again and he is planning to make some recommendations and suggestions and he wants to be sure that there is no argument about that.

Mayor Elicker commented since he is new to the process he is not clear on how the process works. He asked do we approve a number only or a budget with line items in it. The Mayor then amends that number; it goes to the Board of Alders that may again amend that number and then it goes back to the Board of Education and he presumes that they then approve



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that final amended number and a budget that adds up to that number. The Mayor asked if he was correct.

Mrs. Rivera stated that she was not a Board member when they last approved a budget. She alluded to Dr. Joyner who stated that standard operating procedure is for the professional educators to develop a budget for Board approval. They are trained professionals and they thoroughly analyze the needs of the district and give you the best sense of what it will take to run the district. In this case, everyone knows that we are broke so they not only have to come up with a budget but they also have to come up with a mitigation plan as well, so that we can keep as many services as we can with the money we have. Board members don't typically negotiate contracts and they typically vote on the whole budget. They leave the details to the professionals.

Mr. Goldson then gave a history of the budget process two years ago. To the Mayor he commented our former Mayor did not participate in that process because she was going to be the one to receive the budget and make the final decision. He continued this narrative.

Mayor Elicker thanked Mr. Goldson for his explanation and commented that he too will recuse himself. He remarked to Mr. Goldson that it would be helpful if he shared his proposed amendments beforehand with the Board and also with staff, so that they would have the time to assess the impact of those amendments.

Mr. Conaway stated that the "pain" Mr. Penn talked about is also a part of this. He continued to say that two of the things that bother him are shrinking teachers and the bus stops which affect families and children.

Mr. Penn commented the only reason he came up to the podium again is the bottom-line number which we have to explain how we got there.

Dr. Joyner commented that we have to trust Mr. Penn and Dr. Tracey to come up with a budget that we can live with and also handle the details. He continued to explain. He cautioned the Board not to get in too deep because then we get into ethical considerations. He noted that we only manage the Superintendent and we have to trust her because she has done everything possible.

Mr. Penn commented that he appreciates his comments but one of the enumerative powers of the Board is to set the budget. Dr. Joyner agreed but remarked that we cannot go into the details; that would cause problems.

Mr. Wilcox mentioned his understanding is that this will be a motion before the Board and Board members will be able to make a motion whether or not to accept the budget so Board members would be able to make amendments to be discussed if seconded and then we



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could move on from there. His request is that if this happens, it is in writing with some time to consider them. His goal on Monday is to vote for a real budget that has the information that we need, but is an honest budget so that we can continue the transparency that has built up over several years with this Board, especially in the last several months with our new CFO and Interim Superintendent. Mr. Wilcox continued to say he thinks that if people want to present motions they certainly can, he is hoping we can avoid drama.

Mr. Goldson commented that we will avoid drama if he is allowed to serve as a Board member and do what he is statutorily allowed to do. He remarked that we are not approving budget just because someone wants us to, but because statutorily we are obligated to. We have the right to talk about what should and should not be in that budget. He wishes we would be consistent in saying and doing what we do. He explained this statement in detail. He hopes that on Monday when we go into this discussion that every board member has value in this discussion and we agree to disagree but we will not try to stop anyone from having their opinion based on some other opinion.

Dr. Tracey thanked everyone for all the comments and feedback. She thought that this special board meeting was to work out together the kinks and lead to recommendations for us so that we could put them in the packet for Monday so that we don't make a contentious display. We called a special board meeting to go over these things so that we are all on the same page before we get to Monday's meeting. To Mr. Goldson she remarked that he can make recommendations to us and we will see if they can be incorporated into the plan that we have. Everything is to be open and transparent as we always have and if there are any items in the budget that are questionable, now is the time to talk about them before we go into public meetings. All Board members have the right to ask questions, push back and give us their ideas. We are all together as a team; it is all of our responsibility.

Mr. Penn noted that that was the original plan for this meeting; that we would be able to work this out before Monday. The alternative strategy is that if there are amendments or other discussion items you have, please submit them to Dr. Tracey or me and we will include them in the conversation for Monday. He left it to them to decide.

Mr. Conaway remarked that Dr. Tracey and Mr. Penn said it correctly. He thinks this is part of the process and the questions are pertinent. We are in that "pain" place and that's why you are getting the different points of view. He also agrees with what Mr. Wilcox said about letting every Board member have their voice.

Mrs. Rivera stated that the opinions are fine, the questions are fine. She just wants to make sure we are following the process, our bylaws and our agenda. We are all going to have suggestions and opinions and that is fine, just so long as we are following the bylaws and the agenda.



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Mr. Goldson suggested that Mrs. Rivera give him some legal documentation of why he can't bring up the points he made, before Mondays meeting. He noted that we can all agree to disagree, we don't have to be contentious.

Mr. Wilcox remarked that one of the things he has a problem with is shrinking staffing through attrition because we don't know what schools would be involved and he explained at length.

Dr. Joyner commented he agreed with Mr. Wilcox and said that we have been dealing with worse case scenarios. He thinks that looking at certain items because there are some things we will not be able to afford. That is the worst case scenario, if we don't get the money.

Mr. Goldson commented that he agreed with both points and he dittoed Mr. Conaway's points. He has real concerns about shrinking staff, reducing the number of buses, furlough days. Mr. Goldson suggested some other changes that could be made and he explained in detail.

Mayor Elicker commented that his understanding is that we would need special funds to which Mr. Penn commented not necessarily and he explained in detail.

Superintendent Tracey commented that we have come up with some potential things so they would like some suggestions and ideas from the Board for them to mitigate the budget.

Mr. Penn wanted to know what they are looking at to put together for the packet on Monday. Mr. Conaway expressed his concerns about the buses and the teachers, but considering the space we are in, we have to make some difficult decisions. I'm concerned about it but I may have to vote for it.

Mr. Wilcox noted it seems to him we have a proposed budget, mitigation strategies and the add-ons. He suggested that we take a look at the mitigation strategies and put them into potential Part B items and he explained.

Mr. Goldson asked if staff has given us a list of our buildings that we requested and Mr. Pinto commented it is not due until April.

Dr. Joyner thinks this meeting has been productive in spite of the angst but he feels the other things that we have going for us is a fulltime CFO. We may be able to make some adjustments in the next budget year and he commented that he is optimistic. He continued to explain.



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Mr. Goldson remarked that we also asked staff for a briefing on Shef vs. O'Neill because Hartford gets more money than us. Ms. Jackson commented that CAGE did refer an attorney to us. A discussion took place.

180-20

Adjournment

On the motion by Mayor Elicker, seconded by Dr. Joyner, it was unanimously voted to adjourn at 5:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Ginger McHugh

Recording Secretary

“A video of this meeting is available on the NHPS website, NHPS.net, Public Meetings