

East Haddam Board of Education
Regular Meeting Minutes
Nathan Hale-Ray High School Cafeteria
February 10, 2009
7:00 P.M.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Everett Herden, Deborah Fiala, Tracey Gionta, Alan Hyla, Nick Iacovelli, Thomas Mielt, Mary-Beth Mordecai, Bryan Perry, Kerri Willis

OTHERS PRESENT: Robert Carroll, Linda Dadona, Teresa Gilbert, Claire Ianelli, Cynthia Mello, Joshua Rivera, David Scata, Ellen Solek, Mark Walter

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Chairman Nick Iacovelli.

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

III. REPORT OF THE BOARD CHAIR

A. Communications

Mr. Iacovelli began his remarks by stating that he expected the conversation of the evening to be respectful and productive in light of the challenges presented by the current economic outlook. The bulk of the discussion is expected to focus on the upcoming budget and the matter requires serious and thoughtful consideration.

In response to an interruption from a member of the audience, Mr. Iacovelli reiterated the meeting is, by statute, a meeting of the Board of Education. The meeting will be conducted per the by-laws concerning meetings of the East Haddam Board of Education which are printed on the back of the meeting agenda.

While members of the community are encouraged and welcome to attend meetings of the Board of Education, the meetings will be conducted by rubrics set forth in Robert's Rules of Order. Audience members will be invited to speak only when so recognized by the Chairperson and only when the agenda allows for such comments and questions from visitors in attendance (item VIII Communications and Audience of Citizens, on the evening's agenda). When recognized, comments and questions are to be directed to the Chairperson alone, who will refer questions, comments and concerns, to the appropriate individuals for comment and follow-up.

In view of the evening's budget presentation, Mr. Iacovelli moved agenda item VIII for the evening's meeting to immediately follow the Superintendent's report and presentation on the proposed budget (agenda item VI).

III. REPORT OF THE BOARD CHAIR (Continued)

B. Report from HS Student Council Reps.

Teresa Gilbert, President of Nathan Hale-Ray High School, was present to report on activities at the high school. She began by passing out calendars to the Board members.

During the month of January auditions were held for *Lil' Abner*; rehearsals are scheduled to begin soon. The performance will be in early April.

Eighth graders and their parents recently visited the high school. Student Council members gave tours. High school students spoke to the in-coming eighth graders about how to go about selecting their course schedules.

Student Council is working with Mrs. Dadona to develop a 'student of the month' program.

The Chamber Music concert was being held at the Goodspeed February 10.

Boys' and girls' basketball teams are doing very well this year. Senior nights are coming up (girls' February 18; boys' February 20).

College acceptance letters are being received until mid-April.

Teresa thanked the Board, on behalf of the student body, for the difficult work surrounding budget issues this year. She said that the students were appreciative of the hard work that the Board puts forth in the best interests of the students.

Mr. Iacovelli asked about the fencing team. Teresa answered that one of East Haddam's students had recently come in second and third at a state level competition. She remarked that fencing was becoming increasingly popular and that is an exciting sport to watch.

Mrs. Gionta thanked Teresa for the calendar. Teresa said that the calendar should be on-line, if not now, then soon.

C. Report from MS Student Council Reps.

Joshua Rivera and Claire Ianello reported on activities at Nathan Hale-Ray Middle School.

Basketball season is ending and baseball season is about to begin.

The Middle School newsletter and calendar are available on Ed-Line.

Honor Roll was posted, along with citizenship achievements, in the local newspaper and on Ed-Line.

The play "Honk" will be performed April 3, 4 and 5, with a cast of over 100. This is the biggest play ever produced at the Middle School.

III. REPORT OF THE BOARD CHAIR (Continued)

C. Report from MS Student Council Reps. (Continued)

The math team came in 14 of 32 teams statewide. Forty students will be participating in the Invention Convention on March 31.

Connecticut Mastery Testing is in March. Debate team is beginning in Spring.

Claire reported on the eight graders' trip to the High School. She said the eight grade students found it very helpful and enjoyable. They had an opportunity to meet teachers and preview courses for their first year at the High School.

There was a dance on Saturday, January 7, and other one planned for the Friday after vacation.

Student art work is currently on display in the East Haddam Public Library.

The fourth and fifth graders competed in the Fire Poster Contest, since they are still considered grammar school students. There were four East Haddam chosen as finalists. Nick Levesque was chosen as the winner from the school and is being sent to the state finals. The state winner is the recipient of a \$1,000 savings bond and dinner with their family and their principal. The winning art work is reproduced on posters and distributed state-wide.

D. Report from the First Selectman

Mr. Walter stated that this budget year is being driven by revenue. The town of East Haddam has an anticipated revenue deficit of \$200,000 to cover in 2008-2009. Mr. Walter has imposed a spending freeze and any new expenditures need to be cleared by him. Next year's deficit is expected to be around \$250,000. The grand list went up by one-tenth of a percent resulting in \$30,000 of taxable revenue coming to the town from the grand list.

Usually the town's grand list is expected to increase by 3% to 4% each year. This increase is what usually funds scheduled union contract wage increases. Mr. Walter is planning on approaching the town's unions to discuss creative ways of avoiding lay-offs and furloughs. There are currently informal discussions taking place around these issues. Mr. Walter plans on formalizing the discussions in the near future.

IV. ACTION ON THE MINUTES

MOTION: Perry, Fiala; to accept the minutes of the Regular Meeting of January 13, 2009.

FAVOR (6): Fiala, Gionta, Hyla, Miett, Mordecai, Perry
OPPOSED (0)
ABSTENTIONS (2): Herden, Willis
MOTION PASSED

V. REPORT OF THE SCHOOL BUILDING COMMITTEESA. 4-8 Middle School

The Committee has not met.

VI. REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLSA. 2009-10 School Budget

Dr. Ellen Solek reviewed the budget information received by the Board in advance of the evening's meeting. Copies of the board-approved budget will be made available to the general public for review, as well.

She began by acknowledging the Finance Sub-Committee of the Board of Education: Ms. Mordecai (chair), Mrs. Fiala, Mr. Perry, and Dr. Miett.

The goal of the 2009-2010 Superintendent's Budget Proposal is to sustain all efforts to improve student achievement as mandated by No Child Left Behind and to support all district goals and objectives as stated in the East Haddam School Districts' Strategic Plan.

There are already reductions that have been made to the original budget proposal. The original budget present by Dr. Solek to the Finance Sub-Committee totaled \$18,620,514; this represents a 4.75% increase over the previous year's operating budget. The Finance Sub-Committee met twice to go over the original proposal and after deliberation came up with the final proposal of \$18,188,378, which represents an increase of 2.32% over last year's operating budget.

The Finance Sub-Committee proposed further incremental reductions, not included in the Board packets. Budget cuts of \$57,000 would reduce the increase from 2.32% to 2%. Budget cuts totaling \$235,000, would result in a budget increase of 1%; a reduction in the budget of \$412,000, would result in a 0% budget increase over last year.

Areas discussed for further reduction were considered in terms of hierarchical importance, cuts to programs and supplies were considered first, and only then were cuts in personnel even considered, in keeping with the district's philosophy of putting people first.

Magnet school tuition: \$41,792; Institutional supplies: \$30,000; Technical replacement cycle: \$83,500; Union concessions: *amount unknown*; Stipend positions: *amount unknown*; Field trips: \$25,000; Cafeteria monitor (for the elementary school): \$10,978; Non-certified personnel: \$30,000; Certified personnel: \$60,000.

Expenditures, to date, in this year's budget, are highlighted in the pie chart included in the booklet. 60-80% of the budget is in salaries and benefits.

VI. REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS (CONTINUED)

A. 2009-10 School Budget (Continued)

There have been some significant decreases in this budget proposal over last year. Benefits include a health saving account being offered to approximately forty certified staff members. In addition, the supplies and material budget has been reduced substantially.

There are salary increases included in the budget, which are negotiated by contract; services and equipment have also been increased.

The Capital Improvement Plan includes items, short- and long-range, which require replacement or maintenance. This list get longer each year. Recognizing that this year is particularly challenging, Dr. Solek is only requesting that the Board consider replacing the water supply system at the elementary school, as the district is currently out of compliance with the State of Connecticut. The cost of the system would be approximately \$400,000, but the district would also get substantial aid from the state for the projects.

Fixed costs for the year include: employee contracts, health insurance, service contracts, utilities (fuel has already been locked in a substantially lower rate than the previous year), transportation, and food services. With regard to the current companies the district contracts with for transportation (Nichols) and food (Chartwells), Dr. Solek feels that they are delivering exceptional service to the district at very responsible prices.

Revenue sources for the district include: Educational Cost Sharing, transportation, The Cone Fund, The Purple Fund, The Ray School Fund, Board of Education and Services for the Blind, and adult education tuition. It is unclear as to what the exact amounts from these revenue streams will be.

Traditionally, East Haddam has seen increases in its annual budget from year to year – the average increase in the last several years has been at 4.3%. The budget that is currently being proposed has the smallest increase in the last eight years.

The Connecticut Association of School Business Administrators does an annual budget increase survey. The lowest increase in newly proposed budgets is 1.7% in Salem, the highest in New Britain, with a 6.63% requested increase. The average increase in the 17 districts responding to the survey is 3.18%. East Haddam's current proposed budget falls well within the average of districts across the state. Of the responding districts, no one district has come in with a 0% budget.

Dr. Solek clarified the district's commitments as: legislative, community, and ethical.

Legislative commitments include mandates such as No Child Left Behind (federally mandated), and approximately forty other unfunded State of Connecticut Mandates in areas such as special education, discipline, and transportation. Many of these unfunded mandates are costly.

VI. REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS (CONTINUED)

A. 2009-10 School Budget (Continued)

Community commitments were made to the people of East Haddam. First, the school district is the largest municipal employer in the town, this directly affects and helps the town as employees purchase and invest in the town. The Board has further committed to offering, achieving and sustaining a high level educational opportunities for all the town's children. This is also crucial to the economic success of the town as families with children are drawn to towns with the most successful school districts.

The East Haddam School District, without condition, has pledged to serve of 1,300 East Haddam students, to the best of its ability. The Mission Statement, which appears on all planning documents, is as follows: *The mission of the East Haddam School District, where people are our greatest resource, is to develop a community of lifelong learners through a rigorous instructional program delivered by a caring, competent staff dedicated to preparing productive citizens for our diverse and changing society.*

Dr. Solek said that being fiscally responsible supports the district's mission statement, but also the Strategic Plan, as well as the legislative, community and ethical commitments of the Board of Education.

VIII. COMMUNICATIONS AND AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS

Mr. Iacovelli opened the floor up to questions, comments and concerns from those in the audience.

Mr. Paul Maxwell, Chairperson of East Haddam's Board of Finance, spoke to the Board and said that there is an expected \$500,000 deficit for the current fiscal year. More cuts are likely, as the town will be beginning the fiscal year 2009-2010 down \$250,000 because of declining revenues. In addition to asking boards and committees to submit extremely lean budgets, the Board of Finance has been challenging boards and committees to envision budgets including cuts amounting to 5%, 10% and 20%.

Mr. Maxwell remarked that it is easy to miss the signs of a recession in a town like East Haddam, as we do not have factories, major industries, or large retail spaces in the town. But foreclosures are on the rise. People in town are losing their jobs, as they are in other parts of the state and country. Mr. Maxwell said that given the current economic crisis hitting the town, the town, in all good conscience cannot ask its residents for any more money. He said the pain needs to be shared by everyone who lives here.

He appealed to the Board of Education to reevaluate the budget and come back with a 0% growth budget, at the very least, and work down from there.

The Chair recognized Mr. Wyllie Peckham. Mr. Peckham thanked the Board for the hard work that was necessary for coming in with a budget proposal that is historically lower than any budget in recent years. He challenged the Board to heed Mr. Maxwell's advice and try to come in with a budget proposal that is even less than last year's.

IX. COMMUNICATIONS AND AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS (Continued)

Mr. Iacovelli invited the Board to discuss Dr. Solek's presentation. He reminded them that while they could vote on the budget now, they were under no obligation to do so. He asked people to envision deeper cuts. These proposed additional cuts would be given to Dr. Solek to determine their ramifications. He suggested that the Board could meet in another week or two to discuss further cuts and amend the budget proposal as necessary.

Mr. Iacovelli asked Ms. Mordecai, as the Chairperson of the Finance Sub-Committee, for her ideas. She responded by saying that the sub-committee has had a couple of meetings to discuss cutting the budget further. She spoke of the difficulty of being fiscally responsible, while staying true to the mission of the district, the balance between being responsive to the needs of the students of the district and to the people whose money funds the budget. She said that she wished more people would attend Board of Education meetings and come forward with their ideas.

In short, she said, achieving a 0% budget would mean losing teachers. She recalled Dr. Solek's comment about the ethical responsibilities of the Board, and said that cutting teachers seemed to be going against that ethical imperative. That said, she acknowledged the role of the Board of Finance and said that if they insisted on a 0% growth budget, the Board would have no alternative other than to cut teachers. She added that while a 0% growth budget may be considered fiscally responsible, it may not be educationally responsible.

She said she is willing to look at every single line item but, that in the end, a 0% growth budget will mean cutting teachers, not just one or two, but multiple positions may have to be eliminated.

Mr. Perry acknowledged that there was a great deal of work to be done on the budget if 0% growth was the target. He assumed it will take much longer to figure out exactly where and what to cut in order to achieve that goal. He is concerned about children in the district whose families are already cutting back and cutting down because of the economy. He didn't want to see those children impacted negatively in any other way. He also expressed concern for the children who would find themselves in similar situations next year.

Mr. Herden stated that he was concerned about maintaining the direction and focus of education. He said that regardless of the cuts necessary, the curriculum must move forward. Many staff and teachers have worked hard to develop the current curriculum. He is concerned about how necessary budget cuts will impact advancement of the curriculum.

Mrs. Fiala said that she felt this was the best budget that they could come up with; obviously, the Board of Finance may feel differently. Her concern, as Mr. Perry's, is what the impact will be in successive years. The effects of a 0% budget may not be readily felt this year; however, in the years to come, the impact could be substantial.

Mrs. Willis asked about the money left over in the construction contingency fund. The middle school construction project, when complete, will be coming in under budget. She asked whether that money could be used toward funding the 2009-2010 budget.

X. COMMUNICATIONS AND AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS (Continued)

Mr. Maxwell answered that that was not possible. The fact that the building project came in under budget reduces the amount of the bond to the town, but does not result in extra revenue to the town.

Ms. Mordecai asked about possible reductions in buildings and grounds repair. There is \$112,000 in proposed expenditures – mulching, planting, window blind replacement. Perhaps this is a place to start. Could these expenditures be reduced? Other areas she questioned were middle school media resources, as well as miscellaneous programs and supplies. She also questioned the possibility of leaving a speech/language pathologist position vacant (this position is currently vacant due to retirement). She said she didn't mean to imply that such a position wasn't necessary, only asking if it might be a possibility for the short-run. She noted that if any positions went unfilled, or were eliminated, that the decision would be Dr. Solek's, as neither she (Ms. Mordecai) or other members of the Board would be in a position to judge whether or not a position should or should not be eliminated.

Mr. Hyla said that the state government is experiencing a similar situation, which is why they are going back and talking to unions and management, asking people to forego raises for the next couple of years. He said he supports 0% base budget, at this point. He said that attrition was a good place to start. Perhaps, he said, the Board should take a closer look at planned technology expenditures, as another area to curb spending.

Mr. Iacovelli said that maybe a possibility was to leave the middle school vice principal's job unfilled for a year. Perhaps those responsibilities could be shared by others at the middle school.

Mrs. Gionta said she believed the budget needs to be sent back to the Finance Sub-Committee and come back to the Board of Education with a 0% budget. She said that the Board of Finance has already told the Board of Education what to do. She supported the idea of sitting down with the unions to see what sort of concessions can be made. She said if Mr. Walter was taking the lead, the Board should take him up on his offer to sit down with the unions.

Dr. Mielt said that he felt Dr. Solek had done a very good job with the budget presentation. He reiterated that the excellence of the school system has a direct impact on the growth and health of the town and property values. He wondered if there was a way of getting the budget to 0% (or close to it) without cutting people. He, too, felt that perhaps technology might be a place to make cuts. He also questioned the necessity of replacing the water supply system, perhaps this could be done in the following fiscal year.

Mr. Iacovelli charged the Finance Sub-Committee to take the budget back and develop two budget scenarios, each with 0% based budget; one cutting only programs and materials, the other cutting personnel. Mr. Iacovelli stated that he, like the rest of the Board, didn't want to see personnel cuts, but admitted they may be inevitable.

Ms. Mordecai said that one of her greatest concerns about cutting teachers is that it might mean that the district loses those positions altogether.

XI. COMMUNICATIONS AND AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS (Continued)

Mr. Perry said that he felt the unions needed to be spoken to immediately to find out what their positions are. Perhaps they could help come to a creative solution. The figures they come up with would be necessary for the Finance Sub-Committee to fulfill the charge from Mr. Iacovelli. The budget needs to go the Board of Finance at the beginning of March, so time is of the essence.

MOTION: Perry, Gionta; to send the budget back to the Finance Sub-Committee, requesting two 0% base budget scenarios: one without any cuts to personnel and the other with cuts to personnel.

**FAVOR: ALL PRESENT
MOTION PASSED**

Dr. Solek thanked Mr. Carroll and the administrative team for their help in developing the proposed budget.

VII. COMMITTEE REPORTS**A. Long Range Planning**

The subcommittee met on February 5. Information was included in the Board's packet. The committee is charged with looking at new programs and stipends, outside the academic curriculum. They had to table FBLA for discussion at a later date.

Mr. Hyla said that many interesting things are proposed to the subcommittee, but realizes that more and more of these proposals will have to be tabled due to the current economic constraints.

The subcommittee spent time looking at goals and objectives, this discussion will continue at their next meeting.

Ms. Mordecai asked about the stipended positions that had already been approved and whether or not they had to be included in the budget. Mr. Hyla answered that FFA and Tri M had both been approved, but that the stipends for the advisors had not.

Dr. Solek said that consideration of the stipended positions would be sent to the Personnel and Negotiations Sub-committee.

Mrs. Gionta asked for clarification and was told that stipended positions are at the discretion of the Superintendent.

Ms. Mordecai asked if the Board could be given a list of stipended positions.

B. Finance

Nothing more to report.

VII. COMMITTEE REPORTS (Continued)

C. Policy

Dr. Mielt said there was nothing new to report. He stated that second readings are included in the Board packets and included in the evening's Consent Agenda.

D. Transportation

The sub-committee has not met.

E. Personnel and Negotiations

A March 2, 2009 meeting is scheduled.

F. Ray Board Liaison

Mrs. Fiala reported that the Ray Board has not met. However, communication was received from the chairperson of the Middle School Conversion Committee, Mary Jane Malavasi, asking the Board to speed up the process.

G. LEARN Liaison

Mrs. Gionta reported that LEARN met on Thursday, February 12.

She did report that Marine Science High School will not be going forward and that LEARN needs to repay \$2.9 million back to the state.

H. Curriculum Instruction and Assessment Council Liaison

Mr. Herden reported that the committee met on Monday, February 9. There was discussion of the pacing guides, which should be completed soon. A master plan will be developed soon.

There will be a pilot technology program next year. The CIA will keep the Board updated on that.

Mr. Herden said they also discussed the new segments of the Strategic Plan which the Committee found helpful.

I. Open Space Liaison

No report.

VII. COMMITTEE REPORTS (Continued)

J. Local Prevention Council Liaison

Mr. Hyla reported that the LPC met on January 21. The LPC is in discussion about initiatives for the coming year, in collaboration with the East Haddam Youth and Family Services and the school district.

Present at the meeting were representatives of Youth Helping Youth.

IX. OLD BUSINESS

None.

X. NEW BUSINESS

A. Acceptance of Consent Agenda

- 1) Warrant
 - a. To approve the warrant for 2007-08 in the amount of \$2,365,280.48.
 - b. To approve the warrant for 2008-09 in the amount of \$1,726,327.15
- 2) To approve Regulation #4152(a-i) and Regulation #6146 (a-e) as second readings.

MOTION: Herden, Fiala; to approve the Consent Agenda.

**FAVOR: ALL PRESENT
MOTION PASSED**

MOTION: Mordecai, Gionta; to adjourn at 8:40 p.m.

**FAVOR: ALL PRESENT
MOTION PASSED**

Respectfully submitted,

Everett Herden
Board Secretary