

The Board of Education Town of Vernon

30 Park Street – PO Box 600
Vernon, Connecticut 06066

Anne Fischer, Chairperson
Mark Kalina, Vice Chairperson
Stephen Linton, Secretary
Patricia Buxton, Treasurer
Kevin Brown
Deborah Rodriguez
Mason Thrall

Date: February 1, 2021

APPROVED MINUTES

BOARD OF EDUCATION SPECIAL MEETING – BUDGET WORKSHOP

A Vernon Board of Education Budget Workshop was held via Zoom Meeting only on Monday, February 1, 2021 due to a snow storm.

1.0 Establish Quorum

Roll call was taken at 6:01 p.m. Board members present: Mrs. Fischer, Dr. Buxton, Mr. Brown, Mrs. Rodriguez and Mr. Thrall. There was a quorum.

Also present were Dr. Macary, Superintendent of Schools; Mr. Robert Testa, Assistant Superintendent and Ms. Angela Wang, Director of Business and Finance.

Mr. Kalina was able to join the meeting at 6:10 p.m.

2.0 Call to Order

Chairperson Fischer called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

3.0 Pledge of Allegiance

4.0 Community Forum Opportunity for Public Comment on Superintendent's Proposed 2021- 2022 Budget

There was no public comment.

5.0 Budget Workshop

Dr. Macary began with follow-up items from the last budget workshop. A hand-out emailed earlier today by Ms. Wang was reviewed. She provided answers to the following questions:

- How much is EpiPen training per person?
 - \$40.00
- VCMS has a \$5,000.00 deduction for library books. Would they need to budget more funds in eBooks?
 - No, the budget request was proposed by the library department based on the needs for next year.

The hand-out also included a table of budget changes based on discussions from the last workshop. These changes show a reduction of \$1,500.00 to the total budget.

Mrs. Fischer asked about another follow-up item for VCMS Social Studies expenses on page 54. Mr. Testa said the majority of that funding was for NewsELA and we will discuss that further towards the end of this workshop.

Mrs. Fischer asked the Board if they had any additional questions regarding follow-up items. There were no further questions.

The workshop began with the Central Administration budget on page 107.

Central Administration:

Mrs. Rodriguez asked about the Subject Leader positions on page 107 being combined. We have one for Art & Music only. There is no subject leader for Elementary Physical Education. The note will be removed from this line item.

Mr. Brown asked what the Instructional Technology line encompassed with a \$5,481.00 increase. Dr. Macary explained that this is the salary line for our District Instructional Coaches. A suggestion was made that we change the Org description from “CA Instructional Technology” to “CA Instructional Coaches”. Dr. Macary said we can make that change.

Mrs. Fischer asked about the “In lieu of Medical Insurance” line item totaling \$32,000.00 on page 108. Can we eliminate this line item now that we have ratified the Secretary/Custodian/Maintainer contract? Dr. Macary said yes, this could be eliminated.

Mr. Kalina asked about the “Substitute Nurses” line. Do we still need this? Dr. Macary said we leave some funds in there for services for Summer school. Agency fees are included in the Office of Pupil Services budget. This is also where we took the Redi-Nurse funds from.

Mrs. Fischer questioned the “Early Retirement Fringe Benefits” line on page 109. Ms. Wang said we still have some who are receiving this and it should phase out by the 2023-2024 fiscal year.

Mrs. Fischer asked why the “Social Security” line item decreased \$30,000.00. Ms. Wang explained that this is based on the salaries and staff budgeted and was based on FY19 actuals.

Mrs. Fischer asked how unemployment funds are determined. Dr. Macary said it’s based on the last 3 years actuarial.

Mr. Kalina asked about the “Board of Ed Legal Services” line item for \$80,000.00 on page 111. What contracts do we have coming up for negotiation in 2022? Dr. Macary said the Administrators and Supervisors.

Mrs. Fischer asked why Curriculum Development was reduced by \$7,000.00. Mr. Testa said this was based on actual expenses.

Mrs. Rodriguez asked why was natural gas decreased by \$100,000.00 on page 112. Dr. Macary explained that we replaced boilers which will reduce usage.

Mrs. Fischer asked what the “Temporary Services for open positions” note referred to under “Other Professional & Tech Services”. Dr. Macary said this was for police services on the first few days of school to assist with traffic issues, etc. Ms. Wang mentioned that these funds also include temp services for when there is a vacancy in the office.

Dr. Buxton questioned the “Copier Maintenance” click charges line item on page 112 and the “Copier Rental/Lease” line item on page 113. Do we pay to lease the machines and also pay for each copy? Dr. Macary said yes. We just renewed our contract with a new company. The click charges are separated for accountability.

Mr. Kalina asked why the Private Agencies Student Transportation line item on page 113 has gone down so much in 2021 and for 2022 as compared to previous years. It was explained that most of the costs for these services now come out of the McKinney-Vento Act, which was received only in the last few years. The \$97,400.00 is the BOE’s share.

Mr. Kalina asked if the “Advertising” line item on page 114 included the billboard and help wanted costs. Ms. Wang said yes, this included Lamar outdoor advertising, posters, billboard, etc. Mr. Kalina noted that billboards are money well spent.

Mrs. Fischer asked why we are still writing paychecks when everyone should be paid via direct deposit. Ms. Wang explained that we currently have approximately 40 employees from the NextSTEP and Adult Ed programs receiving live checks. All other employees are paid through direct deposit. Mrs. Fischer asked if we could encourage all employees to receive their pay through direct deposit. Dr. Macary said he will discuss this further with Ms. Wang to see if they can. Mr. Kalina asked what the cost savings of direct deposit vs. live checks would be. Ms. Wang said approximately \$20.00.

Mr. Kalina asked about the memberships and conferences we pay for on page 115. Are these being monitored so that monies are well spent? Mr. Testa said all requests are processed through his office and the majority of these requests are associated with a staff member’s role.

Mr. Testa explained that the “Overdrive Marketplace \$2,500.00” note under line item 55999 on page 116 refers to eBook subscriptions paid through Central Office. This was noted to address Dr. Buxton’s previous suggestion to move reduced library book funds to eBook funding.

Mr. Kalina questioned the reduction in “Heating Oil #2” on page 117. Dr. Macary said this is for the VoAg building only. Mr. Kalina asked if we would want to consider changing the fuel source for this building. Dr. Macary said eventually, but we are OK for now.

Dr. Buxton asked why the “Instructional Supplies” line item decreased by \$2,000.00 for Family School Community Partnership. Are we shifting into grant funding? Mr. Testa said yes.

Mrs. Fischer asked about the increase in “Social Studies Instruction” new curriculum for elementary schools on pages 118 and 119. Dr. Macary explained that there are new curriculum standards from the State and we will need to re-do our curriculum. Mr. Testa said we are trying to integrate Social Studies units into our English/Language Arts units. This is a process we will go through over the next few years. Dr. Macary said we are trying to create more non-fiction text into ELA.

Mrs. Rodriguez asked about the increase of \$35,000.00 for the “Replace Computer Equipment” line item on page 120. Are we replacing more items? Mr. Testa said yes. Mrs. Fischer asked “weren’t we trying to use the Alliance Grant for this as well”? Mr. Testa said yes, we use those funds as well.

As was announced during follow-up review at the beginning of the workshop, Mr. Testa spoke about the NewsELA Computer Software line item for \$10,000.00 on page 121. There were several options discussed; should we move all \$7,700.00 in funds budgeted under VCMS for Social Studies on page 54 over to this line item in the Central Administration budget, or should we decrease the \$7,700.00 by \$3,500.00 and move the remaining \$4,200.00 to the CA budget. The final decision was to decrease the VCMS budget by \$7,700.00, move \$4,200.00 to the Computer Software line in CA, increasing it from \$10,000.00 to \$14,200.00 and reduce the overall budget by an additional \$3,500.00.

Dr. Buxton asked why the Edgenuity software was reduced by \$8,750.00 on page 121. Mr. Testa said this reduction was based on student usage and he is comfortable with this reduction. Mrs. Fischer asked if all other software reductions were for this same reason. Mr. Testa said yes, it was. These are fluid line items that are reviewed by a committee to be sure there is no overlap in usage, etc. He noted the LEXIA software increase; this was due to costs going up significantly when COVID-19 hit.

Mrs. Fischer noted that contingency was high on page 122. Dr. Macary said now that the contract has been ratified for the Secretaries, Custodians and Maintainers, retro payments for the last 2 fiscal years will come out of this line item.

The Board concluded review of the Central Administration budget at 6:59 p.m. and broke away for a short BOE meeting scheduled for 7:00 p.m.

The Board returned a short time later and the budget workshop resumed virtually at 7:11 p.m., moving on to the Office of Pupil Services budget on page 131.

Office of Pupil Services:

Mrs. Fischer questioned the change to the “Salary Non-Affiliated” and “Hourly Non-Affiliated” line items on page 131. Ms. Wang explained that an employee was budgeted in the wrong account and the correction was made.

Mrs. Rodriguez asked how many tutors do we have and do they all have degrees. Mr. Testa said

the number of tutors is based on enrollment and we are looking to fill all positions with certified teachers. He will share specific details with the Board at a future meeting once he enhances the program.

Mrs. Fischer asked if the 2 million budgeted for Paraprofessionals includes all paras listed in the Personnel budget. Dr. Macary said yes, we have budgeted for 115 paras.

Mrs. Fischer questioned the “Tuition to Other LEAs”, 70% reimbursement excess cost line item on page 133. Is this what we’ll end up paying? Dr. Macary said this is the net amount. 10% of our student population is outplaced, which is where we should be. Mrs. Rodriguez asked if this is the same case for “Tuition Non-Public Schools”. Dr. Macary said yes, they are separated for accountability.

Dr. Macary expressed his concern for the “Magnet School Tuition SpEd” line item on page 133. It’s a problem and is in a deficit when compared to actual expenditures. The number of students has decreased, yet the costs have increased significantly. A suggestion was made to add the eliminated \$32,000.00 in funds from the “In lieu of Medical Insurance” line item on page 108 into this line item in the CA budget. All Board members responded in favor of this suggestion. Dr. Macary suggested we add \$30,000.00 and place the remaining \$2,000.00 in the Contingency fund. All agreed with his suggestion and the changes will be made to the budget.

Mr. Kalina asked if we should include any extra funding for COVID expenses in the budget. Dr. Macary said we are all set with COVID expenses as we received notice late last Friday that we have been awarded 2 million in extra funding from the ESSER Grant that can be used now through September of 2023. These are Federal funds that can be used over 2 years for COVID recovery expenditures.

Dr. Buxton questioned the lack of funds budgeted for the “Early Childhood Education” food line item on page 134. Dr. Macary said the IDEA Grant covers these expenses.

The Board concluded review of the Office of Pupil Services budget and moved on to the Athletics budget on page 171.

Athletics:

There were no specific questions about the Athletics section as all line items were reviewed in each school’s individual budget.

The Board concluded review of the Athletics budget and moved on to the Capital Plan on page 183.

Capital Plan:

Dr. Buxton mentioned that the Town had a meeting to discuss their 10-year plan. Are we planning ahead also? Her reason for this question is she noticed that Maple Street School does not list many items in the Capital Plan. She went on to say that the school was built in 1924 and will soon be 100 years old. Should we start a conversation about re-purposing Maple Street School? Dr. Macary said the Board of Education would need to initiate this. We should create a committee

and begin with a feasibility study. He thinks a study was done about 6 years ago and will dig that out for reference. The biggest issue will be land. Mr. Kalina mentioned an informal conversation he had with the Facilities Committee regarding Maple Street School and noted that Mr. Linton was also in favor of moving forward with a plan due to the age of the building. Dr. Buxton suggested that, if she were the “Ruler of Rockville”, she would take the entire plaza across the street where Ladd & Hall was formerly located and build a brand new school. Dr. Macary said we should complete a feasibility study with Milone & MacBroom in order to decide whether to repurpose or replace Maple Street School. He also noted that this would also be a good time to start an Early Childhood Committee which would explore moving all Pre-K and Kindergarten students to a new Early Childhood Learning Center. The new building would need to be one level and would require a large footprint. The current footprint at Maple Street is not enough. Mrs. Fischer questioned what would happen to students in Grades 1-5 at Maple Street School if the building was repurposed. Dr. Macary said they could be merged into the other four schools as there would be space from the move of all PreK – K students to the new center. This move would change the imprint of Vernon for years to come. Dr. Buxton asked if this initiative would be added to the Capital Plan. Dr. Macary said the Capital Plan is for projects over 100K on existing buildings only. Mrs. Fischer suggested the Board discuss this further once the 2021-2022 budget review and approval is complete.

The Board concluded review of the Capital Plan.

Mrs. Fischer asked if there were any other questions.

Dr. Buxton asked where the Data Items are budgeted. Ms. Wang said they are included in the Central Administration budget under “CA Information Systems” on page 112. The BOE’s share is \$900,000.00. Dr. Buxton asked if this was enough. Dr. Macary responded, noting 2 problems; the first is that we have vacancies in the Senior Engineer position and are currently outsourcing these services. The second is that Google is housed outside in the cloud whereas our phone system and MUNIS program are housed locally. When we had the internet issue last week, the Police system went down, but thankfully, the 911 system was in operation as it is on a separate line. We need to do an audit of our services, which would cost approximately \$10,000.00.

Mrs. Fischer asked if there were any other questions on the budget. There were no further questions.

She then asked the Board members if they would like to make any further additions or deletions to the proposed 2021-2022 budget or do they wish to settle on the changes made thus far. Dr. Macary noted that, with the current changes made totaling a reduction of \$5,000.00, the proposed budget is moving from a 1.3% increase to a 1.29% increase over last year’s budget. Mr. Kalina noted that if we cut too much more, we might be doing a disservice to our students. He suggested we stay with the \$5,000.00 reduction and approve. Mrs. Fischer asked if everyone was OK with this. All Board members said yes, they were. Dr. Macary was in agreement as well and Mr. Testa thought the budget was fair.

Now that the Board is finished with review of the budget, there will be no budget workshop on Wednesday, February 3rd.

Dr. Macary then asked the Board if they would still want to meet as scheduled at 6:00 p.m. on Monday, February 8th prior to the regular Board meeting scheduled for 7:00 p.m. They said no, it would not be necessary. The February 3rd and February 8th meetings will be cancelled.

Mrs. Fischer concluded by thanking everyone for their efforts during the entire budget process.

6.0 Adjournment

The workshop adjourned at 8:09 pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Stephen Linton, Secretary