

**ST. GEORGE MUNICIPAL SCHOOL UNIT
SCHOOL BOARD
BUDGET WORKSHOP MINUTES
Tuesday, March 16, 2021**

The budget workshop was called to order at 6:33 p.m. with board members Jennifer Garrett, Alane Kennedy, Shasta Minery, Kristin Falla and Emily Chadwick present, all of whom attended remotely. Also present at the meeting were Superintendent Michael Felton, Instructional Administrator Adam Bullard, Business Manager Cassie Kilbride and Jessica Berry, all of whom attended remotely except Mr. Felton.

Public Comment: None.

Presentation:

Mr. Felton began a review of the proposed draft budget. He said the revised amount to be raised locally is \$5,606,452, which is \$215,000 more than was raised locally in the FY21 budget, resulting in an increase of 3.99% in the local assessment. He said that if the school had not lost its Economically Disadvantaged Student state subsidy the increase in the local assessment would have been 1.24%. With the 3.99% increase in the proposed budget, the average increase in the assessment for FY16 through FY22 would be 3.51%. Mr. Felton reviewed expenditures for the proposed FY22 budget which increased by \$97,000, resulting in an increase of 1.55% before adding in reserves. If reserves were added in, he said, expenditures would be down by 2.04%. He then reviewed the FY22 budget allocation which showed 46% of the budget allocated to Article 1 (Instruction) and 20% of the budget allocated to Article 2 (Special Education). Article 2 had been 21% of total expenditures in the prior draft budget but had been reduced to 20% by taking out instructional material and reducing Beth Giggey's time dedicated to special education from 60% to 20%. More of her time (a total of 40%) will now be focused on the Business Office.

Mr. Felton then reviewed the major changes to the draft budget:

- Article 1 (Instruction): Mr. Felton said reductions were made by using federal ESSER II funds for salary and benefits for a 5th grade teacher, a reduction in the high school tuition contingency with the number of additional high school students going from six to five, a reduction in field trip transportation, and a reduction for supplies, curriculum and equipment. As to the latter, he said, the school can be strategic about requesting funds from the St. George School Fund and teachers can seek grants to offset the reductions. An additional \$31,000 was added to the budget, he said, to upgrade the three-day-a-week band teacher to a four-day-a-week band/music teacher.

- Article 2 (Special Education): Mr. Felton said there was an estimated reduction in out-of-district tuition costs and some of the Instructional Reserve will cover part of the special education curriculum. \$22,000 was added to the budget, he said, in order to move the occupational therapist from 2.5 days a week to five days a week. Also, he said, the Special Education Director will receive a 3% salary increase, as will all non-aligned staff.

- Article 4 (Student Activities): Mr. Felton said reductions were made with respect to supplies for student activities, afterschool programs, and the civil rights team; in transportation for Crew Council, band, and the civil rights team; and in sports transportation.

- Article 5 (Student and Staff Support): Mr. Felton said reductions were made with respect to conference travel, with EL reduced by \$4,000 and others cut by 50%; the negotiation of a lower cost for Emote software; and a reduction in the budget for employee training and development.

- Article 6 (System Administration), Article 7 (School Administration), and Article 8 (Transportation): Mr. Felton said the Superintendent, the Instructional Administrator, the Business Manager, and the District Administrative Assistant will receive a salary increase of 3%, with 60% of the District Administrative Assistant's time being allocated to the Business Office and 20% to the Superintendent's Office.

- Article 9 (Facilities): Mr. Felton said the amount budgeted for school zone lights was removed and said he will find a way to take care of these by working with the Town and the Knox County EMA. He said

the St. George Community Development Corporation (CDC) has reduced the rent for the offices at 47 Main Street by \$9,400. Mr. Felton thanked Rob and Margot Kelley and the St. George CDC for renting the space to the school once again at a substantially reduced rate. Mr. Felton said the location of district offices will have to be revisited in future years. Also, he said, the amount budgeted for the new custodian's health insurance was reduced.

- Food Service: Mr. Felton said the food service director's salary was increased by 3%, but food service working salary and benefits were reduced by using some of the federal ESSER II funds.

Mr. Felton said the revised draft budget helps to address the school's space needs with a modular classroom, maintains existing facilities with an investment in roof repair, and increases the school's ability to meet students' needs and control special education costs with a full-time special education director and a full-time occupational therapist. Regarding special education, Mr. Felton said he is thinking about the growing special education needs and the impact the pandemic has had on students. He said having the most robust program possible and meeting those needs is an investment that will help us keep future costs down and reduce our dependence on other districts.

Mr. Felton reviewed how the budget makes use of \$343,000 in federal funds, \$137,000 from reserves, and \$300,000 from fund balance. He said a portion of the \$50,000 taken from the Instructional Reserve will be used to purchase laptops for students in grades 6-8. If the state comes through with some funds, he said, the school will not have to spend all of that. With respect to fund balance, Mr. Felton said he does not want to become dependent on drawing \$300,000 from it every year. If the school gets back the state subsidy for Economically Disadvantaged Students in the future, he said, that will help. Mr. Felton said the school should be receiving new federal money as part of the recent stimulus act. This money will have to be used for items that are not in the budget.

Kristin Falla asked if the additional amount budgeted for the band/music teacher was for salary and benefits. Mr. Felton said health insurance was a large part of it. Cassie Kilbride said any changes to salaries impact health and retirement benefits. Ms. Falla said the number of economically disadvantaged students has affected funding and asked Mr. Felton if he sees the number going back up. Ms. Kilbride said as of January the number was still low. She said the school will be in the National School Lunch Program next year and she hopes families will take advantage of it. Ms. Falla asked Mr. Felton if he has looked into color copies. Mr. Felton said he will work with Ms. Kilbride and Ms. Giggey on this. He said that he will talk with the Leadership Team and staff about strategies to reduce the number of color copies, freeing this money up for other things like field trips, supplies, and curriculum. Ms. Falla asked about the \$5,000 increase in the budget for substitute ed techs. Ms. Kilbride said there was an increase in ed techs which increases the need for substitutes. Ms. Falla asked about the \$1,000 decrease in gym supplies. Mr. Felton said \$3,000 was regularly budgeted but PE/Health teacher Ashley Geel is comfortable with \$2,000.

Ms. Falla asked about the budget for the Johns Hopkins classes. Mr. Felton said he met with Amy Palmer about the Gifted and Talented (G/T) program. He said she spoke about there being a spectrum of need with respect to G/T students as there is with special education students and that there are some highly gifted students who require a great deal of intellectual stimulation and she wants to make sure they get what they need and in the right environment. Mr. Felton said Ms. Palmer works with these students and the school has a volunteer who tutors some students as well. He said Ms. Palmer is requesting the budget for Johns Hopkins because it caters to advanced learners and provides them with plenty of challenges and with peers, which is very important. In her memo on this to Mr. Felton, she states that as highly gifted students get older they need to be able to have discussions with other students about advanced academics and ideas. Her memo also states that the Johns Hopkins option is cheaper than providing tutoring and is of higher quality because the teachers specialize and know how to teach high school and college content to very young students. Mr. Felton said he feels comfortable with Ms. Palmer's explanation. He said Ms. Palmer works as hard as anyone to meet the needs of students and spends money only when necessary. He said he trusts her if she tells him that this is needed to meet these students' needs. Adam Bullard said peer connection is one of the key parts; that is, a cohort of students who go together. He said it is a way for these students to connect with others who are learning at the same pace and not feel isolated.

Shasta Minery said it is good that the school can offer the program but in the past families paid out of their own pockets for enrichment programs. Is it fair, she asked, if there is a child who needs help with math and is not a G/T student. Mr. Felton said that is an important question. He said Ms. Minery's point is important because the school has a duty is to see that every student is getting what he or she needs. He said the school needs to pursue the partnership with Herring Gut, the Apprenticeshop, and other organizations because that will help students. Chairperson Garrett said she thought G/T students had IEP's. Mr. Felton said that the state requires the school to operate a G/T program and develop individual learning plans for G/T students, however the rules and requirements are different than special education. Ms. Minery said it is important to keep in mind that there are families who pay for special programs out of their own pockets.

Ms. Minery asked about the budget for the health curriculum. Ms. Kilbride said that came in after the budget was prepared and is flagged for next year. Mr. Felton said that if it is believed that there is a need for a curriculum a way will be found to find funding. Ms. Minery said that there will be three full-time administrators if the board moves forward with this budget. She asked if the special education director will be a five-day-a-week position instead of a four-day-a-week position. Mr. Felton said he believes it should be a five-day-a-week position and the long term goal is to reduce his own position. He said the school has regular education programming and special education programming which interact and overlap but each has its own separate staffing, funding, programming, rules and procedures. Emily Chadwick asked about the reduction in the budget for Herring Gut. Mr. Felton said Herring Gut is not being used this year as it has been in the past. He said he wants to keep something in the budget for Herring Gut because he doesn't know what will happen in the future. He said it is a program that the school supports and there could be some mutual fundraising with Herring Gut. Ms. Chadwick asked about the increase in the budget for instrument repairs. Ms. Kilbride said in the past donations made to the Carolyn Kanicki Fund were used for this.

Chairperson Garrett said she was concerned about using so much of fund balance. Mr. Felton said that at some point hard decisions will have to be made. He said that if the school gets back the money for economically disadvantaged students that will help offset what fund balance is being used for now. He said Pre-K is a priority and that will have to get done. Chairperson Garrett asked what any additional funds received by the school this spring through the federal stimulus would be used for. Mr. Felton said this money could only be used for things that were unbudgeted. He said he is starting to have talks about fundraising for CTE space.

Ms. Falla asked if OT will be extended to all classes. Mr. Felton said that in the past it has been offered to K-2 classes once or twice a week because of the benefit to students at those grade levels. Jessica Berry said she would look at integrating the occupational therapist into many areas in the school. She said the therapist would work at getting students engaged, sitting properly, and having movement breaks and could consult with teachers as well as work directly with students. Ms. Falla asked if the entire amount budgeted for legal services will be spent. Ms. Kilbride said the school was close to using the budgeted amount during a couple of years. Ms. Falla asked if what is not spent could be used as a safety net and go into fund balance. Mr. Felton said it could. He said fund balance has been built up over the years by underspending.

Regarding the superintendent position, Ms. Chadwick said she has spoken with the Vinalhaven School as that school has a two-day-a-week superintendent. She said she believes what makes our community unique is how reachable our superintendent is but agrees with Mr. Felton that administration cannot be built on one person. She said she would like to see a proposed job description showing what would be reduced in Mr. Felton's role and what would be added on to other roles and to see that there would be no loss in leadership and everything would be covered. Mr. Felton said that is a good point and would be a timely thing to do. He said Mr. Bullard, Dr. Berry, and he would discuss and further define their roles and responsibilities and share that information. Ms. Chadwick said the school is coming off a challenging year but she believes the school should build a strong administration that can deal with turnovers. She said there is a need to understand what the job descriptions are. She said perhaps this will ease peoples' minds that there will not be a lack of leadership. She said it will involve a great deal of work, adding that there should be a focus on this so that when the time comes everyone can see what the changes will be. Chairperson

Garrett asked if it made sense for the proposed budget. Ms. Chadwick said no. Mr. Felton said we want to build something that will last.

Adjournment: The workshop ended at 7:36 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Diane E. Speranza
Recording Secretary