

D.L.B.

Minutes  
**Special Meeting Board as a Whole**  
**West Haven Board of Education**

A Special Meeting of the Board as a Whole for Action on the Proposed Budget for 2016 – 2017 was held in the Board’s Meeting Room on the second floor of City Hall, 355 Main Street, West Haven, Connecticut on January 19, 2016. The meeting was called to order by Patrick Leigh, Chairman of the Finance Committee at 6:00 p.m. The meeting opened with a pledge to the flag.

**BOARD MEMBERS  
IN ATTENDANCE:**

James W. Morrissey, Chairman  
Robert Guthrie, Vice Chair  
Susan Walker, Secretary/Treasurer  
Patrick Leigh  
Karen Pacelli  
Mark Palmieri  
Rosemary Russo

**BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:** Patricia Libero, Rosa Richardson

**ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT:** Neil Cavallaro, Superintendent of Schools  
Dr. Anne Druzolowski, Assistant Superintendent  
Matt Cavallaro, Director of Finance

**CITY OFFICIALS PRESENT:**

**STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES  
PRESENT:** Evelyn Fabian

**B. Public Portion of Meeting**

Chairman of the Finance Committee Patrick Leigh welcomed everyone and asked Superintendent Cavallaro if he would begin the presentation. Superintendent Cavallaro thanked Patrick for the time he has put in so far and hopefully we will answer a lot of questions tonight but if there are more we will do our best to make sure the board is as well informed as can be prior to making any decisions. Patrick said excellent.

Before beginning the presentation Superintendent Cavallaro thanked all the administrators, members of the teacher’s union who attended, Mike McGrath from facilities, Jon Capone and Chris Everone who runs our athletic facilities. If you have a

question feel free to direct it to me and if someone here can better answer the question they are ready to inform you as best we can. Neil thanked his administrative cabinet who helped put the budget together Matt Cavallaro, Dr. Anne Druzolowski, Dave Russell, Jolene Barnes, Joe Lucibello and Susan Misur who assisted in this presentation. Many people are involved who put a lot of time in. If the board requires additional information we will be happy to provide that to you.

The complete power point presentation is located on the WHHS Website. Questions were asked by board members and responded to.

Rosemary Russo asked about the increase in Special Ed students and asked if the 25 student increase in Special Ed were all outplaced. No they are coming in with some Special Ed needs. Some may be outplaced but not all of them. Rosemary asked if they had the percentage is outplaced. Joe Lucibello will get that information for her. A discussion about where students are placed depending on their needs and schools were mentioned. Karen Driend, Principal of Savin Rock School discussed the tremendous turnover in the student population there. The enrollment has been around 500 students all year but there has been over 100 registrations of students who have come into the building which means about 100 students have left. A further discussion took place. Matt Cavallaro talked about what was actually spent on tuition along with Joe Lucibello. The actual expenditure for tuition last year was right around 9M. We had budgeted about 7.3M and we made up for the difference with savings in health care but we definitely have to increase this line item and we know we are not going to get to 9M in a year but a steady increase in this line item is absolutely necessary. The excess cost grant helped us and Joe Lucibello stated that once we reach the cut off number we get 100% reimbursement back for anything over that number.

Patrick Leigh asked what our total reimbursement was for last year. Matt stated it was 1.9M and that is booked as revenue on the city side of the budget. By law if the Board of Education needs that money the city has to turn it over to us. We haven't in the past but we feel that with this 7.6 number and the excess cost grant we would be able to cover anything that the Special Ed tuition would throw our way. A further discussion continued. Patrick asked if the administration had a say in which school a Special Ed student who is outplaced can attend. Neil said we give options but if the student is already placed out when they become the responsibility of West Haven the answer is no. That placement has already been determined. When we start the official outplacement of a student we recommend various facilities. Joe Lucibello explained the procedure and stated parents were able to go and visit the different schools. We can't base anything on tuition it is based on the need of the child. The bottom line is whatever the tuition is we have to put the student in the appropriate program. If parents disagree with the school their child will attend due process is an option but we try to work with the parents as much as possible before getting to that level. Patrick asked if this costs money. Yes if both sides have legal representation it will cost money. Matt added that for Special Ed regardless if it is tuition, supplies or anything for a Special Ed student legally we have to make that purchase whether we are over or under budget. Of course and that is why the

state mandates that 100% reimbursement over the cutoff number. A further discussion took place

Karen Pacelli asked for a Special Ed student who needs to attend a school out of district do we have the transportation go out to bid? No at that point Neil doesn't think we would have hit the \$10,000 threshold that the city requires for us to put out to bid. Most of the time when something like this comes up it is who we can find that will get us a driver and a vehicle to pick the child up every day, get him/her to wherever they are going every day and then back again.

Jim Morrissey asked about the fuel cost from Winkle Bus; is it locked in right now. No, the city purchases the fuel because there is no tax when purchased by a municipality so they get a better rate. It is not just the cost of fuel it is if we use more because we have more routes. Jim asked how much we are paying per gallon right now. Matt will get him that information.

Neil said our legal fee number is a little low because we are entering into contract negotiations with three unions so we believe it is going to be higher than the \$98,000 last year and where we are trending this year and that is why we are asking for the increase. We can do a lot of in-house things because we are more experienced and understand the legal ramifications of what we do.

Jim Morrissey asked if there is anything that our own Corporation Counsel can actually do in-house. Neil said yes, we have done a lot of work with Corporation Counsel Amendola. We do a lot with Workman's Comp. He has assisted us with the Carrigan project, making sure paperwork was in order and understanding the reimbursements and those kinds of things. We talked about other contracts we might be looking at with opportunities for savings as a city and Board of Ed. What we get from Berchem, Moses and Devlin is an expertise in the Special Ed area, some negotiations and expulsions and labor type issues. They give us the expert in those particular areas and I'm not sure we could handle that in-house but I can tell you that we have done more with this Corporation Counsel in house than we have seen in year's past. Jim said when things happen if you contact Corporation Counsel I'm sure they could tell you if they can help. A further discussion continued.

Neil stated this is a process that continues from now until around June 1<sup>st</sup> when we adopt an operating budget. We have had conversations about ways to consolidate services and operate more efficiently and we are always committed to do this. Again what can affect this budget is the number of teacher retirements, what our negotiations entail, what our health benefits look like and any kind of plan we and the city come up with. It is a fluid process. This is the number we are requesting and it is a real number as of today. Hopefully by the time we get to June we will be able to work collaboratively to get a number and a workable budget so we don't have to cut any services. Neil thanked the board for their time and said if we can provide you with any information we will do that prior to your making a decision. You let us know how you want to proceed.

Bob Guthrie asked if they see any major increase changes coming in enrollment for next year. We have given you a couple of enrollment projections and by all accounts it is trending down and over the next ten years you will see a reduction of about 700 to 800 students but next year the projection is around 45 to 50 students less; certainly not enough to impact our budget. Neil is more concerned about the students coming in and the needs that they have. Even though the number may be around the same the students coming into our district have a higher level of need. Bob asked if there is a need to lower any of the class sizes based on the current enrollment number. Neil said the elementary class sizes over all are very good with a couple of exceptions; our kindergarten at Washington and our 4<sup>th</sup> grade at Savin Rock School. The numbers are good. Our goal is to keep it around 21 throughout the district. Neil believes there will be some opportunity to operate more efficiently and hopefully if we can save money in some other areas be able to move that money towards additional support especially at West Haven High School. Neil would like to see another writing lab and more support at the high school. By what we are being told this is going to be a really tough budget year.

Rosemary Russo thanked Neil and everyone who put in time with the budget. She understands with the trending population and Special Ed needs and she thinks they do great with Special Ed and has observed a lot of classrooms and being an educator herself she is envious. With all this said though she feels that to ask the city for an increase of almost 4M at this time is unrealistic and she feels that they get the budget, it is presented to them in an hour and we looked at it over the weekend but she would like to see more time put into it by the board. She would like to make a motion to table the vote tonight until our next meeting and maybe in the interim they could meet as a board or as a finance committee and go line item by line item to see if there is anything we could do before we send it to the City Council for them to have to slash.

Neil said at this point it is up to the board and we are certainly willing to provide you with any information that you ask for. If you would like to meet in small groups to have answers to specific questions we will make the time available. Right now my budget is now your budget so we will proceed as the board feels most comfortable. We want you to have a good understanding of what is being submitted because in the end you have to justify the request.

Chairman Leigh asked if we want to vote on a motion to table the vote.

Mark Palmieri said this is just a preliminary budget. We have to wait until we get it back from the Mayor and City Council that is when we have to sit down and go line by line if you want to do that but as of right now this is the recommended budget and I feel as though we should accept it. In the meantime it is also this board's duty to go to the council and press for more money. The ECS money vs. what the city gives us needs to be leveled out. Sooner or later we need to even that up. Right now he believes there is no harm in accepting this and moving forward and then the real hard part is when we find out what we get from the Mayor and the Council. When we cut this budget it is only hurting our programs. This administration has done a fantastic job building our curriculum and district up and we have lost a lot of good administrators and teachers because they have taken this professional development and curriculum we have and they

have been taken from us by other districts. It is important we continue to support this administration, teachers and our superintendent and accept this budget tonight and then go forward and see where we can cut. He doesn't see the problem in accepting the budget tonight because it doesn't mean much tonight it is when we get the actual budget. Thank you.

Chairman Leigh asked if the board wants to take a vote.

Jim Morrissey said this board doesn't want to hurt our children, teachers or administrators but this board has a lot more questions that they want to have answered. This information was just given to us a few days ago and there is no rush right now to just accept this budget the way it is. We have until February 1<sup>st</sup> to accept this budget and other board members may have more questions between now and February 1<sup>st</sup>. As Neil said earlier this evening he is shooting for the stars with a 4.41% increase and we know we are not going to get that but I honestly wish we could but it just is not going to happen with the city's finances the way they are. I think rather than accept the budget tonight we hold another meeting next week and get some more information from the Superintendent for the old and new board members to look over and ask any questions they may have. We should take our time at this point. We should have another prior to our regularly scheduled board meeting on February 1<sup>st</sup> to ask some more questions. Neil suggested that the sooner you get him the questions the sooner he will be able to get the answer to all the board members. He will provide all the board members with the answers to everyone's questions.

Bob Guthrie agrees with Mark Palmieri that the hard part will come when we get the numbers back but for the benefit of the new board members he certainly has no problem continuing this to let the other questions be heard. Mark said he doesn't either it is not a problem; the majority rules that is fine.

Patrick asked for a motion.

Rosemary Russo made the motion to meet again in special session next Wednesday and vote on February 1<sup>st</sup>.

Bob Guthrie seconded the motion.

Discussion: Neil asked Patrick to let him or Matt know what information they need and get them any questions.

All board members were in favor.

Motion carries.

Chairman Leigh asked for a motion to adjourn.

Rosemary Russo made the motion

Mark Palmieri seconded the motion

All board members were in agreement

The meeting adjourned at 7:25 PM

Respectfully submitted,

Marylou Amendola  
Board Secretary