

Minutes
Special Meeting and Public Hearing
February 24, 2020
7:00 p.m.

Board Members Present: James Chakulski, Jr., David Crim, Linette Dooley, Christopher Lent, Michael Maziarz and Kathy Tolsdorf
Board Member Absent: Joseph Napolitano

Others Present:

Assistant Principal Karen Cavuto, Finance Director Beverly Ciurylo, Alyssa Fortna, Superintendent Maria Geryk, Principal Alyssa Gwinnell, Judy Ortiz, Rachel Riendeau, Melinda Tarbell and Special Services Director Barbara Wilson

I. Call to Order

Chairman Lent called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

II. Pledge of Allegiance

III. Audience of Citizens

Time allotted for public participation is twenty (20) minutes; time allotted for an individual speaker is three (3) minutes.

Chairman Lent welcomed all present and stated that tonight's meeting is limited to the 2020-21 budget public hearing. This evening's meeting will start with questions or comments from the audience, followed by Superintendent Geryk's budget presentation and then a second opportunity for audience feedback. Questions are related directly to the budget. After the public hearing the Board will go into executive session for the Superintendent's mid-year evaluation.

Melinda Tarbell, 113 West Street, said she is pleased to see the enrichment program position is being kept as full-time. She had written to Board members when the original budget proposal indicated a reduction. She wants to thank Superintendent Geryk and Board members for keeping this position in the budget as full-time.

IV. Public Hearing Board of Education 2020-2021 Draft Budget – Presentation by Superintendent Maria Geryk

Superintendent Geryk opened her presentation by stating she is pleased to be here to present the 2020-2021 budget. She thanked the Board of Education members for all their service on behalf of the Columbia children and community. She also thanked the leadership team, staff and Bev Ciurylo who helped prepare this proposal, which she feels is very responsible.

The budget is driven by known costs, known grants available, budget history and current student needs. Known costs are those that must roll over, some of which are estimates until more definitive information becomes available. Budget history shows trends of spending. Meeting student needs includes tuition estimates, contracted services and staffing patterns to fully meet the needs of children.

Goals for student achievement drives budget development. The Board of Education creates goals and the resulting continuous improvement plan outlines evidence-based strategy and action steps. An effective school budget must be aligned with efforts to achieve the vision for our students. We examine instructional minutes, how the day flows for students, and teaching plan time. Continuous improvement goal areas include embedded professional development, high quality core instruction, positive learning environment and communication.

Embedded professional development means teachers are routinely engaged in their own PD aligned to goals. Instruction, curriculum, assessment and interventions will continue and expand. An intended outcome of this budget will be a positive learning environment and school-wide climate.

The total Board of Education budget request (total town allocation and BOE grants) is \$12,982,845. This is a net increase of \$28,632, which is a 0.22% increase. We anticipate receiving \$196,302 in total federal grants that will support professional development, working with specific compilations of students and technology purchases of devices. The anticipated net increase in grant awards is 9.7%.

Therefore, \$12,786,543 is the projected amount to be presented at a Town Meeting for consideration/vote, which is an increase of \$49,717, or 0.39%, from 2019-2020.

Total high school costs are projected to be \$3,920,160, 6.94% less than 2019-2020. This reduction is due to slightly lower enrollment and a reduction in special education, magnet schools, and special education transportation. Total Porter costs are projected to be \$8,866,383, 4.01% higher than 2019-2020. This increase is due primarily to contractual obligations and health insurance.

Superintendent Geryk stressed the fact that special education costs are of actual children and their needs that vary. While next year's projection is lower based on current known needs, the unexpected could happen. But, as of this time, special education costs are expected to be lower than the current year.

Notable increases are in the areas of health benefits, budget/contracted salaries, technology contracted services, special education professional services, regular education contracted transportation and mathematics interventions. Notable decreases are in the areas of special services transportation, high school tuition, outplacements, tuition at magnet schools, high school services, equipment, texts and supplies.

The staffing proposal is increased by 1.0 FTE grade 4 teacher. All services currently in place continue, including enrichment. Other staffing changes are pending further review of needs.

Magnet tuition costs are budgeted to be \$140,756. This is tuition for 27 K-12 students and programs for 4 students.

Our current population exceeds the demographic study's projection. Therefore, our projection for next year is considered to be more accurate.

Notable additions to the Capital Plan include track design and upgrade (which will be a multi-year project), sink replacements, truck, security cameras, classroom renovation (start of multi-year funding because we have 4 classrooms with temporary walls) and playground upgrade.

Superintendent Geryk concluded her presentation by sharing the next steps in budget development:

- Board of Education anticipated vote on 3/2/20
- Send Board of Education proposed budget to FIPAC by 3/15/20
- FIPAC special meeting – budget presentation on 3/18/20
- FIPAC budget workshops will then occur almost weekly
- Town public input hearing on 4/22/20
- Town meeting on 5/12/20 to vote

V. Audience of Citizens

Time allotted for public participation is twenty (20) minutes; time allotted for an individual speaker is three (3) minutes.

Judy Ortiz, 15 Columbia Landing, expressed satisfaction with maintaining the enrichment program. She said it is good to have all students benefit from it.

Superintendent Geryk agreed, speaking of a school-wide approach to enrichment. Universally designed classrooms allow different ways for individual students to show what they know.

Mr. Crim asked if other schools have a similar approach. Superintendent Geryk said there are not as many schools in CT who have enrichment teachers, but she will lead visitations to schools that do when appropriate. Ms. Tolsdorf said Mansfield Middle School has a school-wide enrichment teacher. Superintendent Geryk said they will take a look and see what works for Porter.

Ms. Tolsdorf said the original projection for staff was that there would be no increase because we were going to lose an enrichment position to increase a fourth grade teaching position. Superintendent Geryk confirmed that was part of the original projection, but she received input from community and Board members strongly advocating to maintain the enrichment position as well as adding the fourth grade teacher. Superintendent Geryk supports keeping this in place. Ms. Tolsdorf agrees.

Superintendent Geryk answered questions regarding projected grade enrollment and staffing. She said enrollment may mean we need to reconfigure teacher numbers in about three years.

Discussion turned to enrollment in the preschool program. Ms. Wilson confirmed Superintendent Geryk's responses about the preschool slots filled by lottery, which we offer to satisfy state mandated ratios of special education children to typical peers. The preschool program was created because we are required to provide a special education program to our identified preschoolers. To maintain the mandated 50-50 ratio with typical peers, we offer tuition slots. While we currently "turn away" a number of typical peers, all identified preschoolers enter the program.

Ms. Tolsdorf said the tuition that is paid for typical peers is given to the town, so she believes it would not be as expensive to expand the program to all preschoolers. Superintendent Geryk said the preschool program is already under the requirement to maintain a 50-50 ratio. Because the program was developed to meet the needs of special education preschoolers, we would be incurring costs not associated with identified needs as we would be required to fund teacher and paraprofessional salaries and benefits, supplies, classroom furniture, etc.

Ms. Wilson said we currently have 25 children on the lottery list to fill 10 spots. The lottery will take place in April. A list of area programs is provided to parents for those who are not accepted.

There were no more questions for Superintendent Geryk at this time. She asked that the record reflect the fact that 5 community members e-mailed her and Board members with a strong commitment for maintaining the enrichment program. She also asked that any other questions or comments regarding tonight's revised proposal be sent to her.

Chairman Lent said another budget meeting is scheduled for this Wednesday, if it is needed. It was agreed it is cancelled because all questions were addressed tonight. The Budget subcommittee will be informed of the preparation status at the regularly scheduled meeting on March 2. This concluded the public portion of tonight's special meeting and public hearing.

VI. Executive Session – Superintendent's Mid-Year Evaluation

The Board went into executive session at 7:52 p.m.

VII. Adjournment

The Board adjourned at 9:13 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Christopher Lent, Chairman