

**CITY OF NORWALK  
FINANCE COMMITTEE  
SPECIAL MEETING  
JANUARY 29, 2014.**

**ATTENDANCE:** Bruce Kimmel, Finance Committee Chairman; Douglas Hempstead  
John Igeneri, David McCarthy, Jerry Petrini, Travis Simms, David  
Watts (7:08 p.m.)

**OTHERS:** Dr. Manuel Rivera, NPS Superintendent of Schools; Tony Daddona,  
Deputy Superintendent of Schools; Richard Rudl, Chief Financial Officer;  
Ralph Valenzisi, Chief of Technology, Partnerships and Innovation; Craig  
Creller, NPS Math Instructional Specialist; Brenda Williams, NPS  
Communications Director; George Giannitti, NPS Central Office;  
Francine Hakim, Brookside teacher; Pamela Serlin, Brookside teacher;  
Bruce Mellion, NFT; Thomas Hamilton, Finance Director; Eloisa  
Melendez, Common Council; Shannon O'Toole-Giandurco, Common  
Council; Mayor Harry Rilling (7:08 p.m.); Fay Bowman, Common  
Council (7:11 p.m.); Michelle Maggio, Common Council (7:13 p.m.);  
Richard Bonenfant, Common Council (7:24 p.m.); John Kydes, Common  
Council (7:35 p.m.)

**CALL TO ORDER.**

Mr. Kimmel called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Introductions were made. Mr. Kimmel said that seventeen questions had been sent to the BOE and that thorough answers had been provided quickly.

Dr. Rivera said that when he came to Norwalk, he wanted to get a clear sense of where the District needed to go and what the goals were, along with what the priorities are. This will determine the strategies and the method of measuring the progress. He then narrated a PowerPoint presentation, which will be available on the Norwalk Public School website.

Parents value their teachers and diversity. Many people are concerned about after school programs and class size. As the information came in, the administration analyzed the information

*Committee Member Watts and Mayor Rilling joined the meeting at 7:08 pm.*

Norwalk is now aligned with the Norwalk ACTS goals. There are ways to save money, be more efficient but Dr. Rivera did not want to advance recommendations in the budget without having the long term goals in clear focus. The budget contains both recommendations for this coming school year and also for 29014-15 and 2015-16.

*Council Member Bowman joined the meeting at 7:11 p.m.*

Dr. Rivera then reviewed the Mission, Vision and the Primary Goal of the Norwalk School District, which were all outlined in the PowerPoint presentation. In order to close the achievement gap, every student must meet the goal level in 3rd grade reading.

*Council Member Maggio joined the meeting at 7:13 p.m.*

The Focus Areas and Priorities for the District were the next topic that Dr. Rivera. The District is moving forward with the Common Core State Standards. He said that the District will be moving forward with care in order to avoid the problems that the State of New York experience due to moving forward too quickly.

Dr. Rivera said that there were several areas that needed to be address regarding the online testing that will occur in the spring. Mr. Kimmel expressed concern about the students being ready to take the tests online. Mr. Valenzisi gave a brief overview of the technology. A number of the schools now have adequate Internet service. The students will have the opportunities to start working with the Chrome Books and other computers in the next few weeks. The District is rolling out the information as quickly as the State releases it.

Mr. Daddona said that New York State went with a paper test, but Connecticut will be using an online testing method. All the IEPs have been amended because they were based on the CAPT tests.

*Council Member Bonenfant joined the meeting at 7:24 p.m.*

Dr. Rivera said that the number of Norwalk Students who are now placed out of District has increased recently.

He added that there were some issues with the scheduling and the number of high school study halls. This situation is being analyzed as the high school students will need to have 25 credits to graduate rather than the current 20 credits.

*Council Member Kydes joined the meeting at 7:35 p.m.*

Mr. Daddona said that one of the issues with the number of study halls is that the high schools need more teachers.

The District is working on a Facility Utilizations Plan in order to accommodate the projected enrollments. Dr. Rivera said that he would like to see more after school programs for the students. If Norwalk becomes a District with more than 50% of the students eligible for Free and Reduced Lunches which will change how the Title 1 funding can be used.

Dr. Rivera said that Norwalk is viewed as a wealthy community because of its proximity to several wealthy communities. However, our demographics are much closer to Danbury's.

However, our ECS percentage is more than 14% lower than Danbury's. Mr. Hempstead said that if there was anything that the Council could do to support the District in terms of the ECS disparity. Dr. Rivera said that he was working with someone who is familiar with the outdated ECS formula and the State Education Committee. Mr. Barbis said that State Representative LaValle had reconfigured the ECS formula slightly and run some numbers that would have adjusted the percentage to a more appropriate level at no cost to any other district.

Mr. Rudl then reviewed the Revenue Assumptions for 2014/2015. He said that there is a 4% increase expected for health insurance. He also reviewed the costs associated with the Affordable Care Act for the District. The discussion moved back to the increased costs associated with the recent Avalon development on Strawberry Hill Avenue. The District will be receiving less of a reimbursement from the State for transportation. The District will be going out to bid on the transportation contract. Dr. Rivera said that every time a student has an out of district placement, it drives up the cost of the overall tuition. Discussion about the details then followed.

Mr. Rudl then reviewed the expenses with those present, including the reductions. These reductions included the elimination of six positions, three of which were vacant.

Mr. Kimmel asked what would happen with the planetarium. Mr. Valenzisi gave a brief overview of the plans for the planetarium and the potential development of a science center.

Dr. Rivera said that his job is to improve systems, delivery of services to special education students, to support the common core and move the district forward.

Mr. Hempstead asked if there was a plan in place to do a three year projected budget and longer term planning. Dr. Rivera said that the type of detailed analysis will help with the projections. There are several major areas that were flagged for further research, such as transportation and special education. The assumptions that were made for the longer term projections were that the budget would remain flat. Efforts will continue to find more state aid and grant funding.

Mr. Hempstead asked about the health care savings. Mr. Rudl said that they have been tracking these costs because the District is self insured. Mr. Kimmel asked Mr. Rudl to continue to control the health costs.

Mr. Watts thanked Dr. Rivera for his concerns about the ECS inequity and reiterated Mr. Hempstead's comment regarding the support from the Common Council. Dr. Rivera said that it would be important to develop good strategies to reach out to other legislatures in the other areas.

### **CAPITAL BUDGET.**

Mr. Rudl then directed everyone to the section on the Capital Budget goals. The key projects will include the Common Core materials, enhancements to school security, district technology, a construction project for Rowayton, and district paving.

Mr. Kimmel asked if other district included textbooks as Capital expenditures. Dr. Rivera said that it was not uncommon to have the textbooks in Capital because they were expected to be used for more than five years, whereas workbooks were in Operating because they were consumables.

Mr. Valenzisi said that he expected to see publishing and technology change in the next few years. Mr. Hempstead said that he had heard that some of the curriculum and textbooks were used and then left to sit on the shelves. Dr. Rivera said that the biggest concern was not that the Common Core would be used, but how the District will utilize it. Discussion followed about the various details of the technology involved.

Dr. Rivera then gave an overview of the school safety capital budget.

Mr. Kimmel commented that this year's capital budget was somewhat unique in that the items listed were required for testing and safety concerns. Mr. Hamilton said that the Capital budget will be released on Friday and that it may be a bit higher than last year. He said that the State reimbursement for Norwalk High had turned out to be much lower than expected, which will affect the cost of the Rowayton project. Mr. Hempstead said that he appreciated the longer term maintenance planning.

Mr. Kimmel said that one of the questions that had been sent to the administration concerned the portables at Rowayton. He said that as there had been a number of expansions at different schools and the portables are moved to the various school sites as needed.

Dr. Rivera said that it would be important to set some standards about the portables. Based on those standards, the District can then decide what the future role of the portables will be. However, this must be done thoughtfully rather than in terms of a reaction to an issue.

Mr. Simms asked if there had been any studies done regarding using solar panels and other green technology. Mr. Rudl said that the schools were changing out the light bulbs to more efficient ones. There is also an effort underway to purchase electricity jointly with the City.

Mr. Kimmel asked if the paving projects were coordinated with DPW. Mr. Rudl said that the projects were coordinated.

Mayor Rilling said that he wanted to applaud the Board and Dr. Rivera for putting together a reasonable budget. He said that Mr. Hamilton, Mr. Barron, Mr. Barbis, and Mr. Lyons had already reviewed this budget. Mr. Mellion said that the budget appeared to be reasonable. Mr. McCarthy said that he understood that Mr. Lyons was out of town, but he was disappointed that only member of the BOE present at the meeting was Mr. Barbis. Mr. McCarthy said that two years ago, there was a crisis and the Common Council ended up in the middle of it. The major issue is about trust. Mr. Bonenfant said that he hoped that the maintenance would be kept up so that the building would last longer.

Mr. Kimmel conclude the meeting by announcing that on Feb 13th the budget will be presented to the Council. There will be a public hearing on the Operating Budget on the 20th. The full council will vote on budget cap on the 25th.

**ADJOURNMENT.**

**\*\* MR. IGNERI MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**\*\* THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon L. Soltes  
Telesco Secretarial Services