

**CITY OF NORWALK  
FINANCE COMMITTEE  
SPECIAL MEETING  
JANUARY 28, 2015**

ATTENDANCE: Bruce Kimmel, Chair; Mayor Harry Rilling; Tom Hamilton, Finance Director.  
Board of Estimate & Taxation: James Clark, Erik Anderson.

Common Council: Richard Bonenfant, Douglas Hempstead, John Ignieri, Eloisa Melendez,  
John Kydes, Shannon O'Toole-Giandurco, Jerry Petrini.

Norwalk Public Schools: Dr. Manuel Rivera, Superintendent; Mike Barbis, Board of Ed.  
Richard Rudl, Chief Business & Financial Officer;

Call to Order

Mr. Kimmel called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and introduced the Common Council members in attendance and members of the Board of Estimate and Taxation. He noted that this was a special meeting and only the items on the agenda could be discussed which are as follows: Presentation of the Board of Education Recommended FY 2015-16 Operating Budget, and questions regarding the presentation.

Review Superintendent's Recommended FY 2015-16 Operating Budget

Dr. Rivera went through the presentation of the 2015-16 proposed budget and covered highlights of charts and supporting documentation. He explained that \$170.9 million represents a 2.74 percent increase over the current school budget of \$166.4 million. He stated that this is a sound budget that builds on the goals set forth in the school district's strategic plan, not only good for schools and good for continuing our major initiatives; it's also good for taxpayers to minimize the increase in taxes.

Dr. Rivera outlined that the largest portions of the budget are salaries and benefits, which combined represents 85 percent of the budget. Other factors driving the budget are special education, transportation, utilities, facilities maintenance and administrative staffing.

He reviewed the highlights of the initiatives (Page 6) and summarized areas as follows:

He spoke about improvements with the academic initiatives from Common Core transitions and K-5 literacy system assessments and reported that grade level reading for tracking students is in place. He noted that this was a result of multiple meetings on the new system assessments in progress at the schools and the result of developing and tracking achievement on the common core standards by grade level.

Dr. Rivera reported that he is working on plans for expanding summer school programs to offer to 800 students at five schools for next summer. He spoke about the evaluation of grant funding by the Grossman Foundation to continue the initiatives that are in progress.

Dr. Rivera spoke about the facilities utilization study that will provide an administrative evaluation of support staff and services to streamline duties and responsibilities. He noted that it is critical to identify needs in line with enrollment predictions and to avoid things such as the item on the agenda to relocate students due to other schools. He spoke about new developments that have to be factored in to have plans in place to advance the initiatives underway.

#### Out of District Placement

The school district currently spends \$2.3 million in outsourcing Applied Behavioral Analysis Specialists and Board Certified Behavioral Analysts. The hiring of the specialists for special education program would save the district about \$300,000. Dr. Rivera said the in-district special education program would mitigate the need to send certain special education students out-of-district. Where those facilities out-source services and the district in turns pays an exorbitant amount for those services. He explained the in-district special education program involves the hiring of Applied Behavioral Analysis Specialists, three Board Certified Behavioral Analysts, one additional psychologist and one additional special education teacher.

- Increases in funding of high school marching bands for per pupil cost equity.
- Increased funding to support the school district's growing ELL population (+40%)
- Funds have been provisioned for several new curriculum programs in Social Studies, World Languages and a \$95,000 investment in K-5 Literacy writing.
- The funds set aside monies for the hiring of bilingual receptionists at Norwalk High School and Brien McMahon High School. The two positions are contingent upon the results of an Administrative Support Study.

Dr. Rivera spoke about the goal of the Blum Shapiro study is to examine clerical and administrative functions for operational efficiencies and enhanced services. There was discussion on this study and Mr. Hempstead requested sharing for joint-services consolidation use.

Mr. Rudl referred to supporting documentation that the RFP selection for the facility utilization study to is recommended to be conducted by Silver, Petrucelli and Associates. He noted study will take place over the next six to eight months and will make recommendations in August such as boundary lines of school attendance zones.

Mr. Rudl reviewed the details of the depth of the study that includes facilities assessment of ADA compliance, building components like HVAC, plumbing, roofing, electrical, energy efficiency, enrollment projections, along with inclusion of input from community stakeholders, parents, and staff.

Dr. Rivera added that we have some schools that have extra space and some schools that are bursting at the seams. This study is intended to give us a longer term plan on how to allocate students among the school buildings, how to improve these school buildings and expand them as needed so we don't have to make ad-hoc decisions like the Tracey assignment of students from 515 West Avenue. Mr. Hempstead noted that he was pleased that the school utilization was approved, as we have to look at the system as a whole.

There was a discussion on school over-crowding and the need for a facilities utilization plan.

Mr. Rudl reviewed the following and outlined impacts to the bottom line:

- in 2015-16 would be \$170,987,857 or an increase of \$4,556,992 over the current year
- This is less than the \$5,016,507 salary hike mandated by prior negotiations.
- This was made possible by a decrease in benefit costs from \$34,097,521 to \$33,411,819 and a savings of \$1,224,344 in professional and technical services.

More savings would be realized through major changes in the special education department:

- more programs to serve the needs of special ed. students out of district placement
- The combined costs of developing the in-house program and savings realized by not sending students to other schools results in a \$350,000 savings.

The budget is based on certain revenue assumptions:

- Proposed budget assumes a 2.74 percent increase.
- State ECS funding remains at approximately 7 percent of total operating budget.
- Carryover of all unencumbered Alliance funds.
- Surplus Medicaid revenue is included.
- Grant funding is slightly less than 2014-15 (decreases to \$22 million).
- Maintains strong support for literacy, Common Core, other current initiatives
- Invests in curriculum, technology expansion, facility improvements
- Enhances Special Education services
- Addresses needs for English Language Learners
- Continues commitment to professional development, standards, accountability, recruitment
- Advances design and development for new programs that will move NPS forward

Mr. Kimmel then opened up the discussion to have questions and comments from the Board members to be fielded by Dr. Rivera and Mr. Rudl.

Ms. O'Toole-Giandurco asked why the Interim Superintendent was not in attendance and expressed disappointment that his absence was disturbing and failed to show his involvement in the budget. She that he missed a key opportunity to meet members of the Common Council and BET, and to gain support from those voting on the budget. She added that this was a critical meeting to engage both groups in discussions over the largest element of the City's budget and to hear the City's concerns about the district...

Mr. Hempstead stated that he also wanted to ask about the absence of the Interim Superintendent and echo a missed a key opportunity to meet members of the Common Council. He asked about the \$4 million deficit a few years ago and how that fiasco let to greater involvement by the Council. He stated that this budge seems real and not inflated and he thanked Dr. Rivera and Mr. Rudl for the good plan that was presented. He stated that he had several questions, and the first was a restructure of the salaries and step increases. Mr. Rudl referred to the supporting charts and explained the comparisons were done to Stamford and the step revision was result of doctoral degree stipend decreases and level .15 changes.

He noted that it is a complex matrix and one that is used as a bargaining tool with the Board of Ed during NFT contract negotiations. ...

Mr. Hempstead asked about organizational changes in Assistant Principal positions at the Elementary School. Dr. Rivera explained that the positions are necessary in managing the changes in curriculum with common core standards, professional development and student assessments. He spoke about the former organizational structure and past position cuts where there were no Literacy Coaches and the district provided no support with curriculum revisions and professional development, and the remaining few AP's were assigned to multiple schools. He outlined that the AP role is a critical position to the structure of academic progress and to transition to common core and academic assessments. He spoke about use of foundation money from the Dalia Foundation and Priority Schools and Alliance Grant funding.

Mr. Hempstead spoke about infrastructure improvements, capital projects and facilities management and the need to have Council involvement. He spoke of the antiquated building management systems and lack of putting money to solve problems like leaky roofs and a maintenance program. He stated that there needs to be a study of the building efficiencies and an assessment to determine work flow analysis and there has been lots of neglect where there needs to be more evaluation on ongoing maintenance issues. He noted that the new building at McMahan is already starting to have major issues.

There was discussion on the facilities utilization study and Mr. Hempstead asked what the goals were with expectations. Mr. Rudl noted that the facilities utilization study that will review HVAC issues, windows, security systems and serve as the basis for recommendation on school improvement plans and a potential redistricting proposal.

He added that the layout and structure of the building at Jefferson is one that should have never been improved for renovation or improvement and is one that should be rebuilt at another property.

Mr. Petrini stated that he also wanted to echo comments about why the Interim Superintendent was not in attendance. He expressed concern with facilities and building management and spoke about the need for building maintenance not just custodial roles.

There was discussion on the City's responsibility with building improvements and areas that are in need of repair. Mr. Rudl summarized work being done on school roofs, Kendall in particular.

Mr. Bonenfant stated that as chair of Land Use and Building Management Committee they are aware of gaps between maintenance and building management. He spoke about the need to change pumps and filters on large equipment for efficient use and they had met with Mr. Hodel recently for an update who gave a comprehensive review on how many repairs and issues are ongoing.

Mr. Petrini added that there was a discussion on the need for a need for culture change to have custodians accomplish work orders that affect such building maintenance areas. He explained the challenge with managing school custodial staff without supervision for a night shift at 19 buildings in the City is a serious management problem.

There was discussion on the City's responsibility with building improvements and areas that are in need of repair. Mr. Petrini asked about what the City is doing regarding this issue with the school building maintenance and service and if staffing is the issue. Mr. Rudl explained that there is one plumber, one electrician, one general maintenance/HVAC technician managed under George Giannitti. He noted they have budgeted for an additional supervisor staff and outlined that they have outsourced some building custodial services and are compiling improvements needed at the schools and he is working with the superintendent to address the recommendation to address those needs.

Ms. Melendez stated that she was concerned about security after Newtown and spoke about how valuable it is when security staff knows the students and she shared some of her experiences as a recent high school graduate. She added that there is need for cameras and school resource officers to improve school safety. Mr. Rudl gave an update on new door locks, new window shades, Mylar film for windows for bullet resistance. He spoke about PA system improvements and most needed at Nathan Hale, and the use of close caption TV monitors for security.

Dr. Rivera noted the City wide safety committee and the work done by Col. Killackey with committees at each school and drills that are taken very seriously. He highlighted training done on see something, say something, active shooter, lock down and shelter in place.

Mr. Clark asked about salary increases that are large as a percentage of the budgets and management of those key drivers. Mr. Rudl referred to the charts and documents that detailed the addition of administrative staff that those contract changes, and spread sheets on benefits and workers compensation. Dr. Rivera spoke about needed staffing for Human Resources and Curriculum Specialists that filled gaps after positions were cut over the past few years.

Mr. Clark asked about increases in staffing and grants. Mr. Rudl reviewed areas of revenue the school district expects to receive are grant funding of \$22 million and ECS funding from the state totaling seven percent of the operating budget.

Mr. Anderson asked about the Pre-K center and how he had questioned this put through the BET, that the building needs that have not been identified, and being pushed through on a fast schedule was not practical. Dr. Rivera clarified that the school district currently spends \$2.3 million in outsourcing Applied Behavioral Analysis Specialists and Board Certified Behavioral Analysts. The hiring of the specialists for special education program would save the district about \$300,000. Dr. Rivera said the in-district special education program would mitigate the need to send certain special education students out-of-district. Where those facilities out-source services and the district in turns pays an exorbitant amount for those services. He explained the in-district special education program involves the hiring of Applied Behavioral Analysis Specialists, three Board Certified Behavioral Analysts, one additional psychologist and one additional special education teacher.

There was discussion of the approved plans for the Roosevelt Center and therapeutic classrooms. Mr. Anderson asked for information relative to this transition for Middle School. Mr. Rudl noted that the CES High road model was used and PPT criteria guidelines will provide a continuum of services. Dr. Rivera explained that there is much more evaluation to do with Out Placement but the pre-school is a first step in identifying student special needs and consolidation of services that will then follow through the elementary school system.

Dr. Rivera spoke about the need for more ELL Instructional Specialists and reviewed the recent 20% increase in ELL enrollment, and need for an International Academy for parents in order to meet the education needs of ELL students and transitions with achievement

Mr. Kimmel asked about what the City is doing regarding the issue of school building maintenance and costs that are incremental to the Board of Education Operation Budget yet not outlined to the public. There was discussion on school building projects the efficiency point of repairs and renovations to determine when new school buildings need to be constructed. Mr. Hempstead stated that there was a study done prior to school renovations at Brookside and Brien McMahon, but an update is now due.

Mr. Rudl noted that the facilities utilization study that will serve as the basis for recommendation on school improvement plans and a potential redistricting proposal.

There was further discussion about attendance zone changes and boundaries where new developments and the capacity of our schools. Dr. Rivera noted that we have another building that is underutilized in another part of the city, and all of this has to be a part of the mix, and it could result in a redistricting recommendation. Mayor Rilling noted that Dr. Rivera has offered to volunteer his efforts to stay involved with how the results or the outcome of the study are implemented.

It was noted that Silver, Petrucelli and Associates recently completed an architectural and needs assessment study for Briggs High School. The findings and recommendations of the final report will also have some influence on next year's capital budget request, which itemizes facility repairs and improvements.

Mr. Clark asked if there are projections beyond 2015-16 for the budget. Mr. Rudl discussed the multi-year projections that are mapped out at 2.9% increase to have a long term handle on the needs for the district.

There was a discussion regarding Briggs. Dr. Rivera stated that their current site is problematic. The facility has many problems, the best thing to do would be to rebrand it and move it to a location closer to its student body.

Mr. Barbis reported that there will be two additional portables at Jefferson School, as reported by Mr. Hodel. He expressed concern that the school is extremely over-crowded and the layout is not conducive to this portable layout with traffic patterns and a very congested campus and the absence of sufficient playground areas.

Mr. Barbis stated that there needs to be improvement on the way the City allocates zoning developments and to be aware of the impact to school enrollments. He spoke about how one development resulted in the need for an additional bus which cost the school district \$90,000.

Mayor Rilling commended the Board for commissioning this study and explained that with all of the developments going on, we know that's going to impact our school system, and this is going to provide a roadmap so you can budget for it.

Dr. Rivera added that the recommended capital budget requests nearly \$4.5 million in bonds for school improvements around the district. He explained that this is not what he would describe as the superintendent's budget initiatives; these are what have been developed over the last year that people in this organization have contributed to. He added that at the Board level the strategic plan, but as he met with folks throughout this community, recognizing what our strengths are and where we had needs, we essentially created a series of initiatives that we believe have to continue.

Mr. Rudl explained that the facilities study that will be presented in a few weeks that will detail what is recommended for the district buildings and enrollment projections. Mr. Hempstead spoke about the need to manage and provide continuity on the recommendations and not have the study shelved but keep it actionable.

Mr. Kimmel shared his experiences during his tenure on the Board and Council and shared an ongoing frustration that there was no consistency with the Board of Education on items that are vetted through Building & Land Use. He mentioned that based on his involvement, Mr. Valenzisi had reviewed the investment in technology, elementary laptops, computer labs, projectors, network upgrades, teacher dashboards, etc. He noted that there is now greater collaboration with Finance and Council and Board of Education.

He summarized a few of the comments made by Council members and complimented the BOE Finance Department for providing answers to the questions—which was not always done with Mr. Rudl's predecessor. He noted that Mr. Barbis makes a very good point about the City needs to do a better job with the planning of developments and the impact on education enrollment and school boundaries.

Mr. Kimmel explained the timeline for the budget process and noted that after the presentation of the budget at next week's full Board meeting, it is scheduled to be voted upon on Jan. 6, 2015.

Mayor Rilling noted that the proposed operating budget of \$170.9 million represents a 2.74 percent increase which is possibly the lowest increase in Fairfield County. He thanked the staff for all the efforts with the budget process, and in particular acknowledged Richard Rudl for the financial procedures that he has put into place.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Marilyn Knox, Telesco Secretarial Services

Attachments Chart of NPS Mission, Vision, Goals; Power Point Presentation (on BOE website)

City of Norwalk

Finance Committee – Special Meeting

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# The World Starts Here

**Mission**  
Pre-K to 16 Mindset

**Vision**

•Expand Access to After-school & Summer Programs

**Overall Goal**  
To close the Achievement Gap by 2020 and ensure that all students, regardless of race, ethnicity, circumstances, are meeting high standards.

**Goals**

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪All children are ready to enter Kindergarten</li> <li>▪All students are “on track” to meet or exceed learning expectations by the end of Grade 3</li> <li>▪Students are at or above grade level in 3rd Grade reading</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ELL students meet or exceed State Achievement Objectives</li> <li>▪Special Ed students achieve Mastery of individual goals and objectives</li> <li>▪Norwalk’s schools reach higher performance</li> </ul> |
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| <p><b>Culture of Accountability</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Mission, Vision, Values and Beliefs</li> <li>•School Quality Standards</li> <li>•Leadership Standards</li> <li>•Goals and Metrics</li> </ul> | <p><b>Build Knowledge, Skills and Capacity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Student Engagement</li> <li>•Common Core State Standards: K-12</li> <li>•K-3 Literacy Emphasis</li> <li>•Personalized Learning</li> <li>•ELL &amp; Special</li> </ul> | <p><b>A New Learning Environment for All</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•School &amp; Classroom Culture</li> <li>•NEASC Accreditation for NHS &amp; BMHS</li> <li>•Briggs Turnaround</li> <li>•Expanded Use of Technology</li> </ul> | <p><b>Systems, Structures, and Support</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•HR: Recruitment and Hiring &amp; Reorg</li> <li>•Finance &amp; Resource Management</li> <li>•Data Systems</li> <li>•Technology Training</li> <li>•School Master</li> </ul> | <p><b>Pre-K to 16 Mindset</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Pre-K Learning</li> <li>•Partnerships</li> <li>•Expanded After-school Programs</li> <li>•Expanded</li> </ul> |
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