

REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 17
BOARD OF EDUCATION
SPECIAL MEETING
ANNUAL HEARING
April 5, 2016

A special meeting of the Regional School District No. 17 Board of Education was held on April 5, 2016 in the Student Commons of Haddam-Killingworth Middle School. Board of Education Chair, Joel D'Angelo, called the meeting to order at 7:02 PM.

Members Present: *Maura Cawley, Joanne Nesti, Eric Couture, Sue Twachtman, Suzanne Sack, Kathy Brown, Dan Chase Susan Dean, Jeannie Young, and Joel D'Angelo*

Members Absent: *Neal Perron*

Also Present: *Superintendent of Schools, Howard Thiery, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, Dr. Holly Hageman, and Director of Fiscal Operations, Martha Vaughn, and Board Clerk Larissa Johnson*

Visitors: *Approx. 25*

Call to Order/Opening of Meeting

Board of Education Chair, Joel D'Angelo called the meeting to order at 7:02 PM. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Presentation of proposed 2016-2017 Board of Education Budget

Board Chair Joel D'Angelo and Board Treasurer Suzanne Sack and presented the 2016-2017 Board of Education Budget. The total gross budget amount is \$42,225,841.32. Joel D'Angelo and Suzanne Sack summarized the composition of the budget by location and category and discussed some of the programmatic and staffing changes included in the proposed budget.

Community Input regarding proposed 2016-2017 Board of Education Budget

The following members of the community addressed the Board:

Thurston Clark of Haddam Neck asked about the total budget amount and the discrepancy with the amount that was reported in the Haddam Bulletin.

Steve Lorentz of Higganum asked what the reduction in teaching staff is in relation to the 17.5% decline in student enrollment. He asked about the addition of a full-time-equivalency staff member and coaches and whether the proposed new classes would require additional staff. Superintendent Thiery explained that the new courses being proposed do not require new teachers or staff and that the coaching positions are stipend positions, and the addition of the staff member represents a non-teaching paraprofessional position.

Earle Decker of Higganum asked about the proposal to purchase additional iPads. Superintendent Thiery explained that the iPad purchase is limited to purchasing enough iPads so that a single cohort or grade level can use iPads at the same time, and that at this point in time, the district is not proposing a 1:1

ratio program, where each student would receive an iPad. The district purchased 20 iPads per school last year, and the proposal is to buy an additional 20 iPads next year.

Josh Broder of Higganum asked about the long-term vision of the district in light of the declining enrollment. He suggested that based on information in the Haddam Bulletin, there is excess capacity at each of the schools and that the district should consider consolidating the elementary schools. Board Chair Joel D'Angelo responded that the Board thinks a lot about the Capital plan and improvements, and that in the short-term, the Board is focused on maintenance of the high school. Superintendent Thiery added that the district has done a space analysis of all schools, and that the district cannot yet fold two elementary schools together as there is not enough space. The state recommendations for capacity based on square footage does not necessarily take into account furniture or fixtures in a room, and he added that an important piece to consider when looking at school capacity is how the community would like a classroom to look or feel in terms of how many students and what type of layout the classroom should have. Mr. Broder also asked whether the district has considered joining the state's health insurance program for districts and municipalities or a high-deductible HSA program. Superintendent Thiery responded that this program has just opened up and that the district may look at this option in the future. Mr. Broder also asked if when teachers retire, they get paid for a portion of their unused sick days. Superintendent Thiery explained that this benefit sunset in 1996.

Steve Bailey of Higganum thanked the Board for their hard work. He asked whether the Board owns the portable classroom buildings and what the revenue was for the portable classrooms were when they were sold. Superintendent Thiery explained that the portable classrooms were owned by the district and that the district was unable to sell the units because they were at the end of their life, approximately 20 years old. Mr. Bailey also asked about contractual increases. Superintendent Thiery explained that the contracts for each of the unions outline the increases, and unaffiliated employees are not guaranteed an increase with their contracts. Mr. Bailey also asked whether the Board has considered a pay-to-play program for extra-curricular programs. Board Chair Joel D'Angelo explained that the Board has discussed the possibility in the past, however did not feel comfortable enacting such a program without input from the community. Mr. Bailey then asked about the reduction of 3 full-time equivalency positions, and whether they were simply open and not being filled or if they are actual reductions. Superintendent Thiery explained that these represent actual reductions.

Sherry Boucher of Haddam asked whether the referendum items were included in the budget. Board Chair Joel D'Angelo explained that they are not. She also said that the assumptions included in the budget, such as the estimated number of special education students or health insurance costs are risks and asked about how those are considered. Superintendent Thiery explained that the district looks at past expenses and make responsible assumptions in those areas. She also asked about the risk associated with state grants and supports. Superintendent Thiery indicated that these are based on indications from the state but that Excess Cost Grant funds are not decided until February 2017. Board Member Joanne Nesti also mentioned that the referendum plan is not included in the current budget but that the Board is considering bringing another referendum once the Facilities Subcommittee has an opportunity to complete its review of the needs of the high school facilities.

Aydin Caginalp of Haddam asked whether the enrollment history includes Pre-Kindergarten. He said that last year there was a notation of 42 Pre-Kindergarten students. Superintendent Thiery responded that he would have to check, however the Pre-Kindergarten program is a hybrid program where students with special needs are placed in a class with typical peers. Special education students in that program do not have to pay for the program, however there is a charge for other students enrolled in the program.

Steve Bailey of Higganum addressed the Board again. He suggested that the Board decrease the budget to \$40 million due to declining enrollment and debt service and felt that the Board would not be penalized by the state.

Myles Crete of Higganum addressed the Board. He said that the population has downsized and that the cost per pupil is too high, and that the staff should be reduced. Board Chair Joel D'Angelo explained that staff cannot be reduced based on a 1:1 ratio with declining enrollment. Mr. Crete also asked about what the Old Middle School building is used for. Joel D'Angelo and Suzanne Sack explained that it is now the Central Office and that some of the space is also used for the daycare and some space is rented out to a program for special needs. Mr. Crete suggested that the trends will continue and that the district should be more cost-effective.

Dave Kapitulik of Haddam addressed the Board, he said that he wished more people from Killingworth would address the Board. He said that the Haddam general government budget is \$7 million, whereas Haddam's portion of the RSD 17 education budget is \$24 million. He said that he has looked at the budget numbers and that since 2008, there has been an average increase of 4% of the budget, where the population has been relatively stagnant. He also said that he believed the per-pupil expenditure has increased 33% in the same time period. He said that he would like to know what the staff reductions have been at that time and suggested that the Board should look at further teacher and staff levels.

Aydin Caginalp of Haddam addressed the Board again and discussed that there should be a reduction in administrators. He remarked that the district has been adding administrator after administrator. Superintendent Thiery responded that the total number of administrators had decreased by two.

Thurston Clark of Haddam Neck addressed the Board again and asked about the Excess Cost Grant (ECG). Superintendent Thiery explained that the ECG reimburses the district for a portion of costs in excess of 4.5 times the per pupil expenditure. He said that he and members of the Board testified at a state hearing around increasing the ECG and ECS funding to make the reimbursement levels more equitable among towns. Mr. Clark asked whether the Board had considered making an arrangement to send students from Haddam Neck to East Hampton to save money. Superintendent Thiery responded and said that prior to existence of Region 17, students from the two towns went to many different schools. Sending students to East Hampton in the future would require an agreement with East Hampton and that the town of Haddam would likely still be responsible for carrying the costs of those students' tuition in East Hampton.

Myles Crete of Haddam addressed the Board again and asked about the furnace and roof at the high school. Joel D'Angelo responded that the Facilities Subcommittee is looking at those items and working on creating a plan of action for upgrades to the high school facilities.

Adjournment

Board Chair Joel D'Angelo called for the meeting to adjourn at 8:07 PM.

Respectfully submitted,



Larissa B. Johnson
Board Clerk

Approval:  Date: 5/17/16
Kathy Brown, Secretary