

REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 17
BOARD OF EDUCATION
SPECIAL MEETING
ANNUAL HEARING
April 7, 2014

A meeting of the Regional School District No. 17 Board of Education was held on April 7, 2014 in the Student Commons of Haddam-Killingworth Middle School. Board of Education Chair, Sue Twachtman, called the meeting to order at 7:03 PM.

***Members Present:** Jeannie Young, Michele Amendola, Kathy Brown, Susan Dean, Dan Chase, Amy Jacques-Purdy, Karen Perry, Becky Valenti, Brian Gamache (arrived at 7:45) and Sue Twachtman*

***Members Absent:** Joel D'Angelo*

***Also Present:** Superintendent of Schools, Howard Thiery, Director of Fiscal Operations, Martha Vaughn, and Board Clerk, Larissa Johnson*

***Visitors:** 11*

Call to Order/Opening of Meeting

Board of Education Chair, Sue Twachtman called the meeting to order at 7:03 PM. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Presentation of proposed 2014-2015 Board of Education Budget

Board Chair, Sue Twachtman presented the 2014-2015 Board of Education Budget. In an introduction, she explained that the Board of Education sets high aspirations for all students and funds instructional programs that support those aspirations so that all children can succeed. She said that the district has a number of things to be proud of and cited several examples of excellence in achievement in the district, such as the district's partnership with Columbia University's Readers' Workshop, HKMS's designation as a State School of Distinction for Student Achievement, and 300% growth in offerings of college-credit courses.

She explained that the district is facing some financial pressures. The biggest of which was a major increase in the health insurance renewal, estimated at \$1.07 million, as well as contractual salary increases of \$491,000, a loss of transportation revenue and revenue from the special education cost grant, totaling \$317,000. There is also an estimated increase in special education costs of \$222,000 and an increase in worker's compensation insurance of \$80,000.

Twachtman outlined the financial strategies employed by the Board to reduce spending, such as a change of Insurance Carrier from Anthem to CIGNA, which would represent a savings of \$781,000, the offering of an early retirement plan to reduce staffing for a savings of \$666,000 and the introduction of a tuition for the Burr Preschool program as well as an increase in tuition for the HK Cubs daycare program. The Board is also forgoing any increase in instructional and general supplies, as well as professional development, technology financing, and purchased and professional services. The Board will also be strategically using the Capital Improvement Account for Buildings and Grounds Improvement, rather than paying for improvements out of the operating budget.

Twachtman then presented a chart with a summary of the total budget request. The total proposed budget is \$40,028,420.02 representing a 2.27% increase over last year's budget. The net assessment to the town's will be \$38,334,780.90 at a 3.07% over the 2013-2014 budget. She then reviewed the prior years' net

budget increases of 0.014% in 2012-2013, 0.0% in 2013-2014 and 3.13% in 2014-2015. The average net budget increase over the past three years is 1.05%.

Twachtman summarized by explaining how this budget supports excellence by maintaining instructionally-centered class sizes, expanding the Columbia University Readers' Workshop, creation of a new wireless network at HKHS, the expansion of classroom libraries, increased instructional support in mathematics and student support for mental health and development, and increased opportunity for college credit through the new UCONN Horticulture course.

Community Input regarding proposed 2014-2015 Board of Education Budget

The following members of the community addressed the Board;

Earle Decker of Higganum discussed an article published in the Haddam Bulletin which he said indicated there are less than 800 students between the district's three elementary schools. He asked if the Board was considering closing one of the three elementary schools to save costs. He asked why would a District with less than 2,300 students require the maintenance and cost of running three elementary schools.

Neal Moon of Haddam introduced himself as a resident of twenty years with a Bachelor's of Science in Education. He said that he is trying to get an idea of how much teachers' salaries increase in the district. He asked what salary increases are built into the budget and how much more money is the District required to pay towards salary increases. Superintendent Thiery stated that all of the union contracts are available on the district website under the Business Office tab. He also added that Mr. Moon could email his office and request a copy of the contracts.

Stu Gilmore of Haddam asked if everyone speaking would be please speak louder so that they could be better heard.

Arthur Collins of Higganum asked if money would be added to the Capital Fund because he is concerned if it is under-funded that the towns will have to increase the tax assessment to cover capital improvements. Superintendent Thiery responded that the 1% contribution under the state allowance would never be large enough to cover large projects, thus the District is trying to balance maintenance needs and capital improvements with moving items to funds for maintenance. He also said that the Board has been investing in the account at the end of the year.

Mr. Collins also asked about teachers having to supply their own supplies. Superintendent Thiery responded that teachers are always going to be generous, but that this Board made sure that the budget supports the instructional needs of students and he added that teachers can be reimbursed for personal expenditures on instructional supplies.

He also asked about the bus contract extension. Superintendent Thiery explained that the Board has decided not to extend the bus contract at this time. STA had proposed a net three-year extension and the Board declined the extension because it felt that it needed to see the current contract through and get an RFP at its termination and do its due diligence to ensure that the District is getting the best possible transportation service and pricing.

He also asked about students' physical fitness. He said that he heard that student were scoring at 68% in the President's Physical Fitness testing and he asked why the District is so low. Superintendent Thiery responded that this scoring is consistent around the state and is not unique to the district. Mr. Collins also stated that he hopes that the District is catching students with mental problems at a young age, such as in elementary school and is making sure that kids are getting evaluated by a child psychiatrist as needed.

Chet Harris of Haddam Neck addressed the Board and stated that he felt the previous budgets with 0% increases were in good shape. He said that it's great that teachers have done their part taking concessions and that he hopes to see administrators step up to do the same. He said that the teachers and administrators

are doing a great job, but that it's hard to say so in the numbers. He suggested the Board get creative with the budget to try to find places to save.

Arthur Collins of Higganum addressed the Board again. He said that he never remembers once when someone said this year has been a good year. He said that teachers are down-graded, but they are teaching the future of our country.

Jane Sibley of Haddam introduced herself as a former HES student and that she grew up in town. She said that the district has great teachers. She asked about the decrease in transportation revenue of \$317,000. Superintendent Thiery explained that there are no longer any revenues from the sale of the buses to draw upon. She asked about the increase in the health insurance cost. She asked if there is any wolf meat, any little bits of fat that could be cut to offset the loss of revenue. She continued that people are leaving town because of the increase in taxes that they cannot afford. She said that the school budget is the tail that wags the dog and that a household cannot be run like that. She asked, "Please don't tax us out of our back teeth."

Chet Harris of Haddam Neck addressed the Board again. He asked about adding Track & Field and Photo Club to HKMS. He said that though some of these programs are introduced with low to zero increase in expenses to the budget, that these activities increase in expense over time and asked if as the District adds more activities are there activities that can be deleted. Superintendent Thiery responded that activities that have lost popularity have been dropped and the budget for those activities has been transferred.

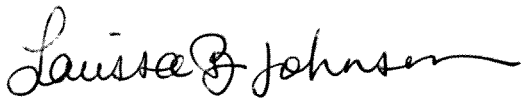
Stu Gilmore of Haddam addressed the Board again and mentioned that physical health standards is also a challenge for the army. He felt that students' poor performance on the President's Physical Fitness tests was due in part to the over-consumption of sugar and soda.

Stanley Burges of Haddam Neck stated that he thinks that Haddam is a nice town but he may have to move because of taxes. He asks the Board to keep the budget where, otherwise he will have to move out.

Adjournment

Board Chair Sue Twachtman called for the meeting to adjourn at 7:48 PM.

Respectfully submitted,



Larissa B. Johnson
Board Clerk

Approval: Becky Valenti Date: 5-6-14
Becky Valenti, Secretary