

Board of Education Regular Meeting
Held Remotely via Zoom
January 19, 2021

Call to Order

Board Chair Davis called the meeting to order at 6:33 p.m. The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Present: Board members Jamie Drzyzga, Debra Dudack, Melissa Finnigan, Brian Fry, Glenn Gazdik, Scott Lingenfelter, Susan Mercik Davis, Maureen Sattan, Michael Sepko; and Superintendent Timothy Van Tassel, Assistant Superintendent Michelle Zawawi, and Business Manager Bill Hoff; and SHS Student Representative Connor Shaw

Absent: SHS Student Representative Akshita Jindal

Board of Education Workshop #3:

- Proposed 2021-2022 Budget Presentations: Special Education/Pupil Personnel Services, General Services/Insurance, and Athletics

Director of Special Services, Diana Kelley, presented the notable changes to the Special Education budget, including a reduction of 6.6 FTE paraprofessionals, which are currently budgeted vacant positions. Ms. Kelley reviewed the line item changes in the Special Education budget, resulting in a 3% reduction over this year's budget. Ms. Kelley said the notable changes to the Pupil Services budget is a reduction of a 1.0 FTE ELL teacher. Ms. Kelley reviewed the line item changes in the Pupil Services budget, resulting in a 2.5% reduction over this year's budget. Board members had questions relative to the reduction in paraprofessionals and whether the district will be adequately staffed. Ms. Kelly said the reduction in staffing was based on student need and the district has the flexibility to provide coverage when needed. Dr. Van Tassel said, at any time, positions may need to be added or reduced based on student need. In response to Board members' questions relative to SEL programming, the number of expulsion-related outplacements and the reason for a decrease in audiological consulting expenses, Ms. Kelley said the department is continually assessing the social emotional needs and programming for students, expulsion outplacements have trended downward over the last few years, and the reduction in audiological consultation expenses is based on student need and the restructuring of how CREC charges for their service. Ms. Kelley added that outplacements in general are lower than compared to a few years ago. She noted that the age of eligibility of special education students has changed from 21 to 22, which has a budgetary impact on outplacement costs. In response to a Board member's question relative to special education salaries, Mr. Hoff said the \$74,174 shown in the special education salary line is the net change after the decrease in salaries for paraprofessionals is offset by increases in special education teacher salaries due to step and degree changes. Board member Sattan requested that the teacher salary increases be separated out from the paraprofessional salary decreases. Some Board members expressed concern over the social emotional well-being of students due to the pandemic and questioned if there was enough support to address these needs. Dr. Van Tassel said this is a well-staffed school district as it relates to students' social and emotional well-being, and the district continuously monitors social emotional supports for students. Superintendent Van Tassel added that state and federal funding may be provided to districts to

support this endeavor. He also noted the Board of Finance has created an alternate fund that the district may access, with permission, if additional special education costs are incurred. In response to a Board member's comments regarding information on creating an autism program in the district, the status of EASTCONN consulting at the high school, and a review of the 18-22 transition program, Ms. Kelley said EASTCONN has conducted a needs assessment at the high school and the consultant is gathering data and meeting with high school staff, and the 18-22 transition program is being reviewed. Dr. Van Tasel said EASTCONN will be an evolving partnership, and the district has discussed creating an autism program in its collaboration with EASTCONN.

Mr. Hoff reviewed the notable changes in the General Services budget including the turnover vacancy savings of \$200,000, a projected health insurance rate increase of 10%, a 10% increase in pension contributions, increases in 410(a) contribution due to more participants, and a projected increase in transportation pending a new contract with M&J. The overall General Services budget is a 3.6% increase over this year's budget. Board of Finance liaison Brian Kost asked questions regarding the insurance line item, noting it drives a large part of the increase. Dr. Van Tasel said there are structural issues as it relates to collective bargaining that makes large scale decreases in health insurance costs difficult to attain without significant reductions in personnel. That would result in larger class sizes and less offerings to students. The district continuously looks for ways to reduce health insurance costs. In response to a Board member's question relative to why there are more participants in the 401(a) program, Mr. Hoff said most employees retiring or resigning are in the pension program, and new employees can only enroll in the 401(a) program. Board member Sattan requested the actual vacancy turnover amounts versus the projections for the last few years.

Athletic Director, Mike Bosworth, reviewed the notable changes in the Athletics budget, which includes a correction in an accounting error, which increases the budget by \$20,000 and changes the Athletic Director position from a stipend teaching position to an administrator position. The overall budget increase is 1.0% over this year's budget. The Board and administration discussed the savings realized due to COVID-19, specifically last year's spring sports being cancelled, a reduction in transportation costs, fewer official and game worker expenses, and no state tournament fees. In response to Board members' questions, Mr. Bosworth said the middle school field hockey team will get new uniforms next year, and the replacement costs for the pole vault and soccer goals are approximately \$27,000. Mr. Hoff and Mr. Bosworth said they will determine if either or both of these projects could be done this year, and if not, it will be included in the Capital Improvement Plan budget next year. Board Chair Mercik Davis requested the percentage of students participating in high school sports. In response to a Board member's question, Mr. Hoff said the per pupil cost per student athlete is \$750 per sport.

Superintendent Van Tasel reviewed the proposal for a Director of Athletics and Student Activities. This position will supervise and provide oversight to the district's athletics, intramurals, unified sports, and extracurricular clubs. Currently, Mr. Bosworth has served in the Athletic Director's role as a 0.2 FTE teaching position and a 0.8 FTE director position. Dr. Van Tasel proposed this position for the administrators group. He reviewed the current athletic, intramural and extracurricular offerings in the district. He shared area school district's athletic director salaries. In response to Board members' questions relative to the salary comparisons, Dr. Van Tasel said some district's Athletic Directors are 10 month positions and some are 12 month positions, and the criteria for choosing these comparison districts were similar size districts, districts in our area, and districts where the position is in the administrators collective bargaining group. Board members discussed the responsibility of the director in evaluating coaches and extracurricular programming. Board Chair Mercik Davis reminded Board

members to send budget questions to Board member Sepko to prepare for upcoming deliberations.

Adjournment

Dudack moved, Lingenfelter seconded to adjourn the meeting at 8:13 p.m. All members voted in favor.

Minutes are subject to approval at the regular meeting of February 1, 2021.

Respectfully submitted,

Maureen Sattan
Secretary

DRAFT