

December 12, 2018

SCRANTON, PENNSYLVANIA

The Scranton School Board of Directors held a Public Hearing for the 2019 General Fund Budget on Wednesday, December 12, 2018 at 7:00pm prevailing time at Neil Armstrong Elementary School, 1500 N. Lincoln Ave., Scranton, PA 18508.

Director Schuster, Budget Chair, called the hearing to order at 7:02pm with a Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

Prior to roll call Board Secretary Virginia Orr read the following resignation letter from Mrs. Paige Gebhardt Cognetti.

December 12, 2018

Virginia Orr, Board Secretary
Scranton School District
425 N. Washington Avenue
Scranton, PA 18503

Dear Ms. Orr, Fellow Directors, and Superintendent Kirijan,

I have asked that Ms. Orr read this letter at tonight's Budget Hearing.

It is with a heavy heart that I write today to tender my resignation from the Scranton School Board, effective immediately.

I have accepted a position as Special Assistant to the Pennsylvania Auditor General, whose office has audit authority over the Scranton School District. It would be a clear conflict of interest for me to remain on the Board.

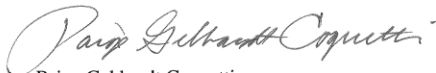
It was very difficult to make this decision to leave the Scranton School Board, as there is much work to be done, but I leave the effort in your capable hands. We have made great strides in the past year, and I will be cheering you on as you continue to work to get the District back on track.

My new position within the Office of the Auditor General is a continuation of the fight for transparency and accountability, and legal and efficient use of taxpayer dollars. It is also an opportunity to highlight the serious, immediate need for fair education funding for Scranton, and all of Pennsylvania's 500 school districts.

I have learned a great deal from you all, and will take this experience with me to my new role, and throughout my life. I am also grateful to the administrators, teachers, parents and students who make the Scranton School District a great place for children to learn and grow every day.

It has been an honor and a privilege to serve as a member of the Scranton School Board.

Sincerely,



Paige Gebhardt Cognetti

Cc: John Audi, Solicitor

December 12, 2018

Roll Call: By the Secretary.

Present: Directors Casey, Duffy, Gilmartin, McAndrew, Popil, Schuster and Dixon
Popil and Schuster.

Absent: Director Lesh.

Director Duffy announced he has his little boy with him this evening, had no choice but to bring him and apologized in advance if he needs to periodically walk around with him but he will be present throughout the meeting.

Director Schuster turned the meeting over to Mr. Pat Laffey, Business Manager with another update of the budget.

[Budget Summary Handout 12.12.18.pdf](#)

Mr. Laffey spoke of the budget last evening providing additional staff projecting a deficit of \$5,558,330.00 and presented this evening an adjusted budget deficit of \$5,498,330.00. Mr. Laffey said, as they were instructed last evening to look again at Central Office Budgets, highlighted savings in the Rental Budget related to the amount that was budgeted for Whittier Annex and Willard Parking, the Medical Budget which will be presented next week with a possible resolution for an advertising opportunity that may offset funds for the district's school physician, Copier Budget decrease, central office line item adjustments in the Business Office, Superintendent's Office, Board Budget, Technology, Elementary and Secondary Guidance and Pupil Personnel, and also looking to provide some Communication savings effective January 1st as they transition to ZITO.

Director Schuster confirmed with Mr. Laffey that ZITO is services for the internet.

Mr. Laffey said that as we sit here tonight we're looking at a projected deficit of \$5,498,330.00.

Director Casey confirmed with Mr. Laffey that on December 19th we'll be voting on the copier proposal and if it is awarded to the lowest bidder with a lease agreement, all encompassing.

Dr. Kirijan responded all encompassing.

Solicitor Audi replied that it is all the same, there is a copy of the lease but we haven't entered into that yet.

Director Schuster asked if there are any updates in the IT budget.

Mr. Laffey replied that the IT budget was reviewed and in 2018 the IT budget including professional services was \$993,000; the 2019 IT budget as you have it has been reduced after consulting with IT staff down to \$889,000, a reduction of \$104,000.

Director Schuster asked if there is going to be a presentation tonight by PFM regarding school consolidation.

December 12, 2018

Dr. Kirijan responded that it was not scheduled for tonight but she will get the report and provide it in the board packet.

Director Casey asked if they can see before Wednesday a broken out reduction that we've seen from vendors throughout the year.

Mr. Laffey said that is something they've been working on and hope to provide that in the packet this weekend.

Director McAndrew said last night they were provided with a breakdown of mandatory teachers they need to hire for Special Education and in 2016 a motion was passed for a hiring freeze which should still be in effect. Mr. McAndrew understood the need of special education teachers due to the special education population growing. Mr. McAndrew also realizes safety issues with regards to Dean of Students but the positions are not mandated by PDE.

Dr. Kirijan responded that the Dean of Students positions seem to be a bone of contention so if the board wants to continue the hiring freeze then they can remove those positions, she has no problem with that, the positions were added as a request from principals. Dr. Kirijan added that due to the SFT contract and because of the growth in the cyber program, cyber teachers are needed and are essential to that program.

Director McAndrew said he is not comfortable hiring two Dean of Students at each high school, he would be more comfortable hiring a librarian for each school because the cuts were made last year and now adding two administrative positions, he does not agree.

Dr. Kirijan told Mr. Laffey they can scratch the positions if that's the will of the board.

Mr. Laffey said he would reflect that in the board packets this week.

Director Schuster asked if it is the will of the board to go through with the staffing recommendations minus the Dean of Students.

Director Casey asked about the breakdown of PCAs which he requested last night.

Dr. Kirijan said she worked with Mrs. Baddick today and it will be ready for the packet this weekend but since it was reported that we need twelve additional special education teachers, she received a call today from PDE and they are sending someone from the Special Education Department to assess the situation, audit the classroom numbers and determine what we're saying we need is indeed what we need adding that Mrs. Baddick is going by the state standards so they're pretty certain PDE will support that effort.

Director Dixon added that we're going to have oversight from PDE on the caseloads that Special Education teachers are carrying and the reasons for the PCAs being assigned in the IEPs.

Director Schuster asked that since they are looking at the Special Education teachers if they also will be looking at the PCAs.

December 12, 2018

Dr. Kirijan replied yes and to add to Mr. Casey's request, Mrs. Baddick did summarize what the IEPs require and the PCAs.

Director Schuster asked if there are other options, maybe contracting out PCAs.

Dr. Kirijan said yes, they did look at other options last year and they decided as a board to hire a certain number and the rest were contracted out so it's a hybrid model right now and she would like to continue that model again.

Director Schuster asked if the PCAs from last year were recycled after their kids moved on, Dr. Kirijan replied yes.

Director Dixon commented if she remembers correctly she thought there is some language that these PCAs can be medically reimbursed.

Dr Kirijan said those that are contracted out, they do qualify for medical access billing and they are using that billing for reimbursement to the district for those PCAs.

Dr. Kirijan added that the need right now is twelve, they are contracting nine or ten and they are on rotation so they would still have access to them but this is additional.

Director Gilmartin asked if they can expect a determination from PDE before next week.

Dr. Kirijan said she is hoping for that and will reach out to Mrs. Baddick and request they expedite this prior to the budget.

Director Popil asked if the hiring freeze is still in place. Dr. Kirijan responded yes.

Director Popil said he cannot vote for an increase in staff unless it is completely mandatory, required by law and he thinks the hiring freeze is a good thing, a step in the right direction.

Director Schuster asked if the hall monitors are considered new or replacement positions.

Mr. Laffey said they would be new positions to the budget.

Dr. Kirijan said that because they furloughed last year, the intermediate school principals spoke to the board about their concerns without hall monitors and they each asked for two additional hall monitors and that would be up to the board. Dr. Kirijan added that if they continue the hiring freeze then the teachers will have to be out of their classrooms, continue to position themselves and circulate throughout the school.

Director Dixon asked Dr. Kirijan if she has been discussing with senior staff and exploring different schedule models to cover that better.

Dr. Kirijan said that their schedule models would not cover supervision better and they are looking at other options for the intermediate schools.

December 12, 2018

Director Casey asked Mr. Laffey if there are any services that pay rent in our schools and wondered if we would be able to ask for rent from services like Aramark, if that is an option to generate revenue.

Mr. Laffey did not know at the moment and he thinks that any rent from Aramark would most likely reduce their food service reimbursement but he would look to see what the guidelines say about that.

Director Schuster asked if there was anything further from the board and moved on to public comment. Director Schuster announced they are looking at a \$5.4 million deficit and a possible tax increase that could exceed the cap of 4.6%; the median household is looking at \$90/year.

Public Comment

Jim McGough, asked if the handout provided is the only document the board has related to the budget and wondered how they could make a decision from only that document.

Mr. Laffey explained that the original documents are provided on the website, in the Business Office and the public library. An audience member also informed him that there were additional documents handed out at the past two meetings which Mr. McGough did not attend.

Mr. McGough said that last year there was a video presentation providing expenses from the previous year.

Director Casey said they received all of that at the beginning of December.

Mr. McGough asked Mr. Laffey if he has those figures and again Mr. Laffey explained they are available on the website, the Business Office and the library.

Director Dixon also agreed that they were presented at the Budget and Finance Committee meeting in November.

Director Gilmartin informed Mr. McGough that that meeting is available to view online.

Mr. McGough expressed that the district is being sued many times during the course of the year by parents because the district is not following IEPs and asked how much that costs.

Dr. Kirijan explained that they are working with PDE Special Education Department; they have just completed an audit of special education IEPs and have made recommendations where they can do better in that area and they also changed the way they were negotiating with opposing attorneys when they are challenged.

Mr. McGough said the directors need to know where the money is being spent in regards to the legal situations. Director Dixon said the board receives the expenses monthly along with explanations.

December 12, 2018

Dr. Kirijan said the Special Education law requires attention to students with disabilities and they look at each student individually and do the best they can; if the parent is not satisfied sometimes there is litigation and they try their best to keep that cost down.

Bob Bolus, resident and taxpayer disagreed with a tax increase, feels there needs to be more cuts not more taxes and the teachers need to do more work, not less. Mr. Bolus continued that they cannot keep taxing and not be efficient and suggested fees on the non-profits.

Holly Meade, NEIS teacher, said the only way to correct the budget is to demand fair funding from the state and applauds Director Duffy's efforts. Mrs. Meade said a PR campaign is needed to get the message out to the public and asked the board to make a public statement with all of the needs of the district and urged the board to travel to Harrisburg.

Mrs. Meade questioned where the \$6 million is going specifically.

Dr. Kirijan said they have been guided by PDE and legal counsel where the money should go.

Director Casey questioned if there are funds allocated for ELA.

Dr. Kirijan said she received an email from PDE that we're doing the right thing on how that money should be allocated.

Suzanne Furey, Armstrong teacher, understands there are no easy answers; said the cuts cannot continue, the children in the district have challenges in their own lives and need our support, the cuts have been devastating and mental health issues are off the charts.

Mrs. Furey said the buildings are full, class sizes are larger, the district population is growing and the children have already lost librarians, instruments, music and languages.

Mrs. Furey asked the board to please don't make any more cuts, they cannot afford to take more away from the students, and it's not fair to them.

Derek Raines, spoke of the numerous changes in the City of Scranton, people are on fixed incomes or disability and people are moving out of the city because of the increasing taxes. Mr. Raines hopes the Scranton School District does not raise taxes; people cannot afford to live in the city anymore.

Kevin Kays, SFT and taxpayer, referred to the PDE Agreement regarding staffing levels and maintaining the same level of educational programs.

Dr. Kirijan responded that a narrative and summary was submitted to PDE, she met with them after the furlough plan was put in place and the plan for this coming year is that the district is not to furlough any teachers. Mr. Kays asked if the state agreed with her narrative.

December 12, 2018

Dr. Kirijan said yes, it was all submitted, they looked at everything, they came back with some suggestions and the state and their legal counsel has approved it. Mr. Kays asked for the date it was submitted. Dr. Kirijan did not know the date off the top of her head but it was several months ago and she would email Mr. Kays in the morning with the exact date.

Director McAndrew asked if the breakdown of the funding could be put on the website.

Dr. Kirijan replied that the funding is due January 1st and June 1st.

Mr. Kays asked what positions have been determined as essential personnel.

Dr. Kirijan said they are given requirements by law for classroom size limitations in Special Education, they are following that to a "T", right now they are over in some of those classes and they have submitted to the board their needs based on the special education population and staffing needs. Dr. Kirijan added that PDE is going to come and look over the classrooms to ensure that the requests are reasonable and meeting federal guidelines.

Mr. Kays said he agrees there needs to be additional administrators at both high schools and expressed that librarians should be considered essential as they are not there just to check in and check out books but are a great resource for students and their research.

Mr. Kays spoke about going back to the old scheduling. Dr. Kirijan said she wanted everyone to understand that if they go back to the schedules as they were, the furloughs that were made would be null and void, you would have to bring back those teachers, part of getting the \$6 million grant is helping a bit in the budget but is not the end all answer to what is needed. Dr. Kirijan said that she is being asked to hire back positions but she doesn't know the concessions the teachers are willing to make in order to help with the budget, and she understands they cannot negotiate on the floor but they are in a catch 22 kind of situation and she knows Mr. Kays understands this.

Mr. Kays continued that no audit has ever said there were ever too many teachers and pointed out the increased costs in Transportation, it has increased 11% each year, that the teachers are not a drain on the budget like Transportation is. Mr. Kays added that they are able to reduce the number of buses at anytime; the bussing contract is the worst transportation contract in Pennsylvania history and doesn't understand why it isn't bid out today.

Dr. Kirijan commented that because the contracts are being looked at by the Attorney General's office they're not going to move forward with anything in transportation right now but they are looking at a cut in special education transportation possibly in January.

Mr. Kays agreed with Mr. McGough regarding the special education lawsuits and Mr. Kays believes if the district was in compliance we wouldn't have the costs of litigation and settlements.

Director Schuster asked Mr. Laffey and Mr. Gretton if they can explore the idea of bidding out a piece of the bussing contract.

December 12, 2018

Mr. Gretton responded that he would defer to the solicitor if he feels the contract is allowed for that.

Mr. Audi said he would look into it.

Courtney Novak, teacher, parent and taxpayer, recalls from a recent discussion that PFM was going to look at bus routes and asked if that has been done yet. Dr. Kirijan said they are waiting for that report.

Ms. Novak asked if there has been a study on copiers and if the report has been brought back yet.

Dr. Kirijan said yes and the report has been brought in, they've gone through the bid process and they will be making a recommendation soon.

Ms. Novak, as a parent, is worried if there will be any more cuts to children and programs and as a teacher there is a rumor that there will not be a settlement of the SFT contract and it is not part of the budget.

Dr. Kirijan asked if Ms. Novak is asking her if they built a raise into the budget for teachers. Ms. Novak said not as much as a raise but a step increase. Dr. Kirijan said she does not believe it is included in the budget that has been presented to the board at this time.

Ms. Novak asked if the administrator's raises continue or if they received a 4% decrease in pay as mentioned in the past.

Dr. Kirijan said they have been in discussions with administrators regarding a decrease in pay and she believes what they have learned is that since teachers have moved forward on the salary schedule, principals have not and the principals are willing to work with them and she hopes that teachers will come forward with some concessions in salary also.

Ms. Novak said she understands that but believes maintenance has also received an increase and thinks everybody needs to do their part.

Director McAndrew and Dr. Kirijan both corrected Ms. Novak and said that maintenance has not because they have been under a pay freeze.

Ms. Novak said that she agrees with Mrs. Meade regarding the suggestion of a PR campaign and asked to keep the teachers informed and let them know what they need to do, they are all willing to rally together but there needs to be a plan to come together as one.

Director McAndrew said there has been discussion and thinks we need to just get on a bus and do it.

Dr. Kirijan responded that there is more to it than just that and she attended the PA Schools Work conference, as did Suzanne Furey and Holly Meade, and there is a push all over the state, there is a plan to follow, they have to coordinate as a board and

December 12, 2018

administration to get it started and they definitely need teachers and parents on board, the plan has a piece in it for everyone so when they are ready to roll that out she hopes that everyone in this room and any family and friends will join in the effort.

Director Gilmartin said she would like to be brought up to speed on the plan; she was not able to attend the first session.

Dr. Kirijan said that the December 19th agenda will include the appointment of board members to that and she went to the introductory meeting and now it will be up to the board to get their committee ready and she knows Mr. Duffy has been a die-hard during this entire effort and some things he has been doing single handedly, this plan calls for masses of people to do together and she hopes everyone will be involved.

Ms. Novak also expressed concern of the tax increase.

Director Schuster asked if there was anything else to discuss.

Mr. Duffy apologized, appreciates everyone coming out, he knows he has been in and out of the room with his son and he loves to hear all of the comments about state funding because it is by far the largest problem, he has been working on it for 3 years and he's been to Harrisburg three or four times as well as the rest of the board. Mr. Duffy added that the Scranton Times has been doing a great job covering this and he knows the state realizes how underfunded they are, they want to help so if they are able to show the same fortitude that the folks in Erie, PA did we should get what we deserve and we'll be successful; Mr. Duffy reminded everyone to watch for the article in the Scranton Times this weekend he feels will be extremely eye opening.

Director Schuster said that when we're looking at state funding we're \$29 million short per year, this is our tax money and we should all be fighting together.

Director Casey asked if there is supposed to be a presentation regarding funding at the December 17th budget meeting.

Mr. Schuster invited anyone who would like to hear more from Susan Spika to please come to the meeting on December 17th at the Administration Building.

There being no further business a motion to adjourn was made by Director McAndrew, seconded by Director Popil and the hearing adjourned at 8:23pm.

By: _____