

December 10, 2018

SCRANTON, PENNSYLVANIA

The Scranton School Board of Directors held a Public Hearing for the 2019 General Fund Budget on Monday, December 10, 2018 at John F. Kennedy Elementary School, 2200 Prospect Ave., Scranton, PA 18505 at 7:00pm prevailing time.

Budget Chair Director Cognetti called the hearing to order at 7:05pm with a Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

Roll Call: By the Secretary.

Present: Directors Cognetti, Duffy, McAndrew, Popil, Schuster and President Dixon.

Absent: Directors Casey, Gilmartin and Lesh.

Director Cognetti announced this is the first of three public hearing and budget discussions and the board needs to hear from the public their questions and concerns about the 2019 budget and this gives the board the opportunity to continue to work on the budget. Mrs. Cognetti asked Mr. Pat Laffey for an update.

Mr. Pat Laffey provided a summary of the current Local revenues of \$67,195,000, State revenues at \$83,140,231 and Federal revenues of \$6,982,000 with other financing sources at \$1,742,746. Mr. Laffey also broke down expenditures of instructional services of \$104,730,961, support services of \$39,422,671, non-instructional services which include sports, athletics and community of \$1,551,378 and debt services of \$18,437,836 which includes the T.A.N. and interest ending the proposed total expenditures at \$164,142,846; resulting in a projected budget deficit of \$5,082,869.00.

[Budget Hearing Summary Handout 12.10.18.pdf](#)

Director Cognetti asked Mr. Laffey to explain the \$225,000 miscellaneous revenue on page 2 of the summary. Mr. Laffey said it is related mostly to the Moses Taylor grant to employee social workers.

Mr. Laffey added that there is still a \$2,000,000 shortfall, there are things to consider as we move into tomorrow and Wednesday evening; we'll be looking at health care expenditures, there may be some reductions we can make there and we'll be checking every calculation we have on the big target areas like salaries and healthcare items and hope to bring that down a little bit.

Director Dixon asked Mr. Laffey if the \$1.5 million requested for needs in the Special Education presentation the other night is included in this.

Mr. Laffey said it is not included. This is as we sit here currently with staffing at this time.

Director Cognetti asked Superintendent Alexis Kirijan about the wish lists they received from principals and that she said she was working on bringing that down as they certainly cannot grant every wish and asked for a version of what Dr. Kirijan felt is needed.

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Dr. Kirijan responded that Special Education is mandatory so what is requested for Special Ed is definitely what is needed and as for hall monitors, the board approved two hall monitors for Northeast Intermediate and because of the supervision she feels they also need two at West Intermediate and two at South Intermediate in this budget and she believes the two approved the other night is included in this budget and asked Mr. Laffey if that is correct.

Mr. Laffey said no; that it would be an addition to this budget.

Dr. Kirijan said that would be six hall monitors in this budget and none of the staffing needs are included; it was given to you as a snap shot of what the principals are asking for in the coming year. Dr. Kirijan added that they don't know the exact number and what is needed until somewhere around February/March and that they are working from this year's numbers. Dr. Kirijan further added that as they go through the process of students registering for various courses at the high school level they see what they can do about combining some classes at the intermediate level and taking a look at the cyber school and they did ask for additional positions for cyber which they will need in the coming year. Dr. Kirijan believes there is a need for two additional positions and would need to have multiple certifications in order to serve more students in that program and she also noticed the safety supply and they received an unexpected grant of \$25,000 so they will not have to invest in safety supplies as the grants they are getting seem to be taking care of needs in that area.

Dr. Kirijan spoke of minority recruitment travel and she thinks they may be able to work that out another way and there may be some volunteers interested in going on recruiting trips if they do it at all and she doesn't believe it needs to be added to the budget.

Director Cagnetti commented that there was talk about taking from the board budget for that and there should be a line item for travel if the Board Secretary needs to travel anywhere, but the rest of the board does not ask for reimbursement and she would like to see a line item in the budget for minority recruitment travel.

Dr. Kirijan asked if they are going to fund that as an initiative for the HR Department and would go into that budget.

Director Cagnetti thinks it should be \$2500 for board travel and to pull the money for minority recruitment from the HR budget.

Dr. Kirijan wanted to be clear that the nine members of the board are agreeing to not be reimbursed for travel and is that something that the board decided on.

The board seemed to be in favor and Mr. Duffy said if a resolution is needed for that he has no problem with that.

Dr. Kirijan commented that the board is not participating in some of the board trainings that are offered, would be beneficial to this board and she would hate the fact there isn't money in the budget for the board to travel to prevent the board from taking part in training.

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Director Cagnetti said that is not how she viewed it; the board works for free, many hours a week and she doesn't think at this time they have the ability to take a trip and be reimbursed for travel.

Director Dixon said we're talking about \$2500-\$3000 that we're going back and forth about but that's not the real number we're seeing and there are staffing needs that can be added into this, we heard the other night that we need \$1.5 million in Special Ed alone so we're talking \$2500 compared to over a million dollars and she knows its fiscal calendar and she understands that.

Dr. Kirijan said that for the past 3 years they had 123 special education teachers and they kept it at 123 until the staff cuts last year.

Director Dixon understands that said at a numbers perspective this is not a real number so to prevent this from happening again next year they need to look at the reality of what they're facing in the upcoming year because it is difficult in a fiscal year vs. calendar year; we're in the middle of two different years.

Dr. Kirijan thinks in January once the budget is passed if they agree to put special education back into the budget then they would be able to work from there.

Mr. Laffey said the confusion on his part is having it authorized, when it is effective, is it January, and all that goes into the cost and why it isn't included as of yet; he doesn't know what the timing of the need is, is it Jan 1 or September 1.

Dr. Kirijan said the timing of the need is yesterday so January 1 would be what they're looking for.

Director McAndrew thinks what they're asking for is a forecast for next year.

Director Dixon said if they don't start forecasting in advance they're going to run into this every year.

Mr. Laffey said that when they prepared this budget there was a certain staff number and then within a month the Special Education Director showed them that the population grew and that how quickly it changes.

Dr. Kirijan said that 123 special education teachers over time seems to be the average and the prediction and if they try to go lower than that they end up in the situation they are in now.

Director McAndrew said last year we hired special education teachers.

Director Duffy said it is not just the teachers it's the paraprofessionals that goes along with it.

Director Cagnetti said what they need to do is work on a budget that includes what they need and asked Dr. Kirijan what she is proposing they do with this budget in December to capture what is needed next year.

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Dr. Kirijan thinks it was twelve special education teachers, twelve PCAs, and six hall monitors.

Director Cagnetti asked if that is from the wish list from the building principals, if those two things are the pieces that are needed.

Dr. Kirijan said that separates the needs from the wants.

Director Cagnetti asked also the two cyber teachers?

Dr. Kirijan apologized, and yes, adding the two cyber positions.

Director Cagnetti said she needs to look at a revised version that includes what Dr. Kirijan feels in mandatory.

Dr. Kirijan said they will work on that for tomorrow evening.

Mr. Laffey said all the calculations were done before the staffing wish lists but they can plug the numbers in very quickly.

Director Schuster confirmed with Mr. Laffey it is just the twelve special education teachers and twelve PCAs and asked if there is anywhere they can offset these costs.

Mr. Laffey thinks it's around \$200,000 and they are looking at healthcare costs and some other areas we may be able to offset the costs.

Dr. Kirijan said they were looking at out of the district students enrolling in the center based program.

Director Duffy inquired if the copier bids are up for the next meeting.

Mr. Laffey said there are some savings related to copier services.

Director Cagnetti said that included in the special education request was an expansion and increase in rent and feels they need to look at that as a whole piece including the hall monitors and cyber and as Mr. Schuster pointed out we're adding things and she referred to a chart she provided to the board categorizing potential expenditures, cuts and increases. Mrs. Cagnetti announced that copies are available to the public.

[Potential Expenditure Cuts and Increases by Category handout 12.10.18.pdf](#)

Dr. Kirijan commented that if the board recalls their principals have asked for additional assistant principals to replace what they lost, they came in to talk to the board about it and at West Scranton High School with the increase in population the principal there requested that you replace the Dean of Students position and Mr. Coyle also spoke to the board about replacing the assistant principal who retired with one Dean of Students and that was the two requests that the board received and when you are looking at safety and management of the student body that is something the board may want to consider.

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Director Dixon said they're not considering anything with negotiations going on. Mrs. Dixon inquired about how negotiations are going. Mr. Laffey responded status quo.

Director Cognetti responded to Dr. Kirijan that she understands what she is saying about that but what is difficult is to sit here and continue to hear her add things to it.

Dr. Kirijan replied that she is not adding anything the board has not already heard about.

Director Cognetti understood and said they talked about the special education teachers, the hall monitors, cyber and now hearing about two more.

Dr. Kirijan said she is asking if the board consider it based on the request from the principals who came and spoke directly to the board.

Director Cognetti said she looks to Dr. Kirijan to determine how hard you need to push for their requests, she's not allowed to talk to the principals; she has no access to them to discuss their needs.

Dr. Kirijan said they stood before the board and pled their case and when a principal comes and pleads their case like that and we see what the discipline record is, we're all concerned about safety and when there is a crisis in a school that is something she would ask the board to consider; she's not asking for an assistant principal, she is asking for a Dean of Students which is \$69,000 as opposed to \$80,000 for an assistant principal.

Director Cognetti said so when Mr. Butka from Northeast spoke they all agreed that they would hire hall monitors; they are absolutely listening and trying to do everything they can; but what is difficult for herself is to sit here and she feels like the work she is supposed to understand, and is supposed to read her mind and figure out what is needed when they really need to have it all laid out to them.

Dr. Kirijan said she has already heard Mrs. Cognetti say that she wants a document and she will have it color coded to provide to her for tomorrow night.

Director Cognetti said that its special education, hall monitors, cyber, Dean of Students; she needs to be able to look at the numbers and how much more she needs to have to keep adding for staff.

Dr. Kirijan responded that counselors have also spoken directly to the board about their cuts in counselors and how they're looking to add staff, and again with the safety and crisis issues in schools with changes in the PA Future Ready Index and the work that is required of our counselors, she can make a case for counselors also.

Director Cognetti said she needs Dr. Kirijan to establish her case and present it to the board so that they know what to consider.

Dr. Kirijan said she honestly can say that she is not prepared to do a full staffing report to the board which they really don't do until March of each year but she can point out those things that she feels is critical, she cannot tell you from the teaching staff what is needed at this time but she can get her what she is asking for.

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Director Dixon said that when the staffing needs are completed in the spring which is the timeline, there may be a possibility as well where there are reductions in certain schools on types of curriculum requests and she thinks what Director Cagnetti is asking is to give the board what she absolutely knows and would like and she thinks Dr. Kirijan has done that.

Director Cagnetti said they need to know what this is and she doesn't understand how they're supposed to pass a budget now if they don't know what is needed next year.

Dr. Kirijan said she understands and it has been her struggle since she's been in the district, since they're trying to get changed over from a calendar year to a fiscal year and it's very difficult.

Director Dixon looked to Mr. Laffey for confirmation of staffing needs as two cyber teachers, twelve (12) special education teachers, twelve (12) PCAs, six (6) hall monitors, and two, (2) Dean of Students. Mrs. Dixon asked if the Dean of Students become part of Act 93.

Mr. Laffey replied yes.

Director McAndrew what he is seeing now, we're at \$5,000,000 and by tomorrow it's going to be \$8,000,000 and he wished they knew this before.

Mr. Laffey said that he has said all along that this is where we are now; the staffing requests came in well after it was prepared.

Dr. Kirijan said that they made a conscience decision not to add it to the budget because they didn't know if the board still wanted to have a hiring freeze which they have been working on except for the essential positions so if they are going to have a hiring freeze except for essential positions then she is saying they need twelve special education teachers, twelve PCAs and if they want to lift the hiring freeze then they can consider adding these other positions they spoke about this evening and if they recall when the demographic study was done they saw where they have a couple classes moving through and where they can collapse some classes and until they work in the spring with the principals, they're not sure how many classes they can collapse but that would be an offset if they can collapse some classes.

Director Dixon asked what grade is in the bubble now. Dr. Kirijan said the bubble is going into 7th grade, that's why the intermediate schools are experiencing what they are.

Dr. Kirijan summarized that they will add the positions discussed this evening because she believes that she is hearing that the hiring freeze will be lifted to add these essential positions.

Director Cagnetti said maybe have a separate worksheet because they have to determine if they're going to have a tax increase and personally she understands the mandatory positions they must have, but as for the Dean of Students she thinks the administrative hiring freeze needs to stay.

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Dr. Kirijan said that the Dean of Students is a critical position when you talk about safety and what's happening in our schools.

Director Dixon added that when you talk about safety the need of guidance counselors and what we're doing about mental health, we should be addressing that as well.

Director Cognetti said that we're mandated on the special education side; maybe the guidance, hall monitors, dean of students should be mandated and they're not, and that's something we take to the state to get funded – sounds like were \$5,000,000 underfunded- maybe the case for that is we cannot afford to do this, it's not mandated, but it should be.

Director Duffy said that even if they're mandated, the district is still not reimbursed the way they should be.

Director Dixon said she would like to see it broken down so they know what the numbers are.

Dr. Kirijan said the first time it was brought to the board it was not broken down.

Director Schuster said last year he felt they did a lot to curb expenditures

Director Cognetti said they have the sheet of costs for each position, it's a whole set of them.

Director Dixon said none of us has a crystal ball and we're just trying to get a grasp of the real numbers.

Director Duffy is concerned about borrowing, thinks it's the big elephant in the room that they haven't been talking about and it seems even if we raise taxes to max, do not hire not one person; whether we're mandated to or not we're still short.

Director Cognetti said they should still continue to look at cutting athletic costs, maybe charging for athletic activities, continue to look at savings on the athletics side, the West Side boundary changes associated with costs as well as Act 93 savings which they will be meeting with them this week.

Dr. Kirijan asked if transportation will be left alone for now because there were some savings within that budget but it was not realized.

Director Duffy said that unless PFM realizes some savings, he would like to hear more about the special education transportation.

Mr. Gretton said that savings would not happen for another year.

Dr. Kirijan said she will have something to report to the board regarding the parking for teachers at Willard and for the Whittier Annex rental so this Wednesday evening they can discuss that and she have some proposals for the board to look at.

Director Cognetti said they would like to see real estate assets, something that they may potentially use to cut costs down the road.

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Director Popil commented that the last meeting he brought up transportation and he still thinks there is substantial monies that can be saved in transportation and with a little imagination if they did something with elementary schedules, maybe stagger some of the start and dismissal times they could use buses for more than one purpose if they can collapse five or six runs and save \$50,000 a year and he is also reluctant to lift any hiring freezes since we're still in a financial crisis unless it is mandatory.

Mr. Popil said we're looking at another large tax increase and they will still have to borrow money to meet general obligations, he doesn't see any large revenue sources coming in, he would like to think the state would see we're underfunded but he can't count on that, we're in a nitch here and for the lack of a better word, we get screwed on our reimbursements.

Mr. Popil continued and repeated as he said before that transportation is probably the largest area where we're underfunded and it's because the formula is stupid, it doesn't account for districts like Scranton that don't have the 50-60 mile runs every day; we have 5-6 mile runs every day but we still have the costs and he can't anticipate where the legislators are going, they don't care about us, we have to take care of ourselves and it's a painful dilemma. Mr. Popil thinks as a board, as a unit they have to decide what their goal is and stick with it; if it is to eliminate the deficit, eliminate operations, it's very difficult to make exceptions.

Director Dixon agrees that we will keep going in this cycle of borrowing and borrowing, until we can't borrow anymore, we're not going to get anywhere until we stop, and we have to increase revenue, cut expenses, that's the bottom line – but the revenue increases and we continually spend. Mrs. Dixon added that if the state comes in they will find cuts.

Director Duffy agreed with Director Popil however we are drastically underfunded, he has no other focus than to raise suicide prevention and to demand from the state that we get what we deserve like Erie has; he has a lot of faith that they will give us money, the state has to step up and by far this is our biggest problem and thanked Sarah Hofius Hall for her help in bringing this problem to the surface with him.

Director Schuster inquired if Transfinder has recommended dual runs/triple runs and if they have taken into consideration staggering the times.

Mr. Gretton said is hasn't been taken into consideration; they have to do a complete examination adding that many districts have gone to their charter schools and asked them to cooperate if they can stagger their times and they have been successful with that.

Dr. Kirijan said that bus schedules were changed to tier systems for runs between elementary and intermediate schools, we don't bus high school students so this would be another added layer to what Mr. Popil was suggesting.

Director Dixon asked Mr. Gretton if there was any discussion about eliminating transportation for intermediate students and using public transportation in areas of hazardous routes.

Mr. Gretton said that hasn't been pursued as far as he knows.

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Dr. Kirijan said when the intermediate times were changed one bus carries elementary students then picks up intermediate students so there is no additional costs.

Director Dixon asked if a four day work week was discussed.

Dr. Kirijan said that she contacted the state Department of Education and asked if they would give their opinion, she was informed that Hazelton requested a four day work week and the state turned them down so she wanted to know if the state would consider proposals for that and if there is a specific reason that Hazelton was turned down or whether they just will not allow it. Dr. Kirijan added that it would require a longer school day in order to meet the required number of hours and she is waiting for them to get back to her

Director Cagnetti responded that they heard from parents and teachers on that and the kids are already in school too long, too many core classes within the day and she doesn't understand the philosophy, she just thinks that would exacerbate the problem of children already sitting in a classroom for too long.

Dr. Kirijan felt that Mrs. Cagnetti is hearing two different things.

Director Dixon said that it is a scheduling thing that the staff would work out.

Director Cagnetti commented in terms of focus for a child from an educational standpoint.

Dr. Kirijan said as far as she is concerned from an educational standpoint she thinks children learn all day long and if they vary activities in between its not too long and she believes the administrative staff would agree with that.

Director Cagnetti asked about the IT budget, if there have been any cuts, she noticed big chunks of purchases.

Mr. Laffey said the budget has been reduced from 2018 and they can meet with staff again.

Dr. Kirijan said they have a proposal from the NEIU and their IT specialist can work with Scranton for \$2500/month under contract; it can be terminated when we want or keep it as long as we want and that person can help determine what the IT Department needs are and help prepare the materials for the IT assessment or audit that the board responded to the AG about. Dr. Kirijan added that the IT Director's salary is still in the budget so if they decided to use NEIU it would be half the salary.

Director Cagnetti questioned the business office staffing.

Dr. Kirijan said that was never removed from the budget.

Director Cagnetti said that if they chose not to have a CFO at a very high salary, maybe giving Mr. Laffey an assistant to work with to assume Mr. Laffey's number two spot, and bring Mr. Laffey's salary up to where it should be as Business Manager.

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Mr. Laffey said there was a reduction in that line item 110, upon final adoption of the 2018 budget and they did reduce that line item by \$40,000, the previous business manager's salary is not included in this budget.

Dr. Kirijan asked if they're proposing a raise for the Business Manager and the addition of an Assistant Business Manager and they also have proposed adding a grant writer, and they also know that Mr. Gaynord will be leaving and it is a critical position that would need to be replaced.

Director Cagnetti commented on the need of Mr. Gretton, his guidance and services and mentioned having an understudy.

Director Popil asked what the student population is at West Scranton High School.

Dr. Kirijan said they're expecting 900 students there next year based on the 8th grade population at South Intermediate.

Director Popil said he thought when he was on the board years ago that the capacity was 1800 and at one time West Scranton High School was a junior/senior high school and he always thought that it might be a large savings if they brought 7th and 8th grade from the intermediate school to the high school and use West Scranton Intermediate as an elementary center and possibly close a couple elementary schools; he thinks that is something to look at.

Dr. Kirijan said they have talked about that and asked PFM to do an analysis of our schools and their population, look at the way schools are structured and make some recommendations and asked Mr. Gretton where they are on that.

Mr. Gretton said they are wrapping that up now.

Director Popil said without a doubt West High is the most underutilized building in the district. Dr. Kirijan agrees and thinks PFM will have a plan for us soon.

Director Dixon said that process started last year by looking at the boundaries because Scranton High was overcrowded and West High was under crowded.

Dr. Kirijan said she was glad it has been brought out on the floor so that our constituents will all understand that we have to look at some different ways to structure our schools.

Public Comment

No one from the public signed in to speak.

At this time, Director Cagnetti thanked Mr. Laffey and Mr. Gretton and since there wasn't anyone that signed in to speak, asked if there was any comment from the public.

A woman from the audience who did not identify herself nor did she sign in to speak questioned the discussion about minority recruitment travel and also questioned the

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overpopulation in high schools and intermediate schools and asked if elementary schools are overpopulated.

Director Cagnetti explained with regards to the minority recruitment that there has been discussion that the representation gap between the racial makeup of our teachers vs. our students so they would like to ramp up recruiting by going out to other places like Bloomsburg, Penn State or Temple and other universities that have lots of education students to try to recruit them to come to Scranton and apply and diversify the workforce we have in the district.

Dr. Kirijan responded that she thinks they have a good handle on the elementary schools right now, 400 students have been sent back to their home schools in the last few years and we have a pretty good balance; some of the elementary schools are much larger than others but most of our students are going to school within their boundaries unless there are extenuating circumstances with the students and then some exceptions are made but she would say that right now the elementary schools are not overcrowded.

Director Dixon said in addition to West Scranton High School being underutilized she thought South Intermediate is too.

Dr. Kirijan said the board did a lot this year to change the boundaries at South Intermediate and this year the 7th and 8th grades at South are to capacity and as we keep sending the 6th graders there according to the boundary changes she thinks it will be okay.

Director Duffy thought South Intermediate was the most crowded. Director Dixon and Dr. Kirijan both responded that Northeast has always been the most crowded and West Intermediate is at capacity right now.

Director Cagnetti now thanked everyone for coming and announced that another meeting will be held at Isaac Tripp tomorrow evening at 7:00pm.

There being nothing further a motion to adjourn was made by Director Duffy, seconded by Director Popil and the hearing adjourned at 8:19pm.

By: _____