

MANCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION

BUDGET WORKSHOP

Wednesday, November 14, 2018

6:00 p.m.

Manchester High School – Bailey Auditorium

PRESENT: Conyers, Hughes, Maio, Meggers, Pattacini, Scappaticci, Stefanovicz, Thames

ALSO PRESENT: Superintendent of Schools Geary, Deputy Superintendent & Special Services Radikas, Director of Finance & Management Clancy

ABSENT: Hagenow, Director of Human Resources Sone-Moyano

A. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:10 p.m. by Darryl Thames, Snr., co-chair of the Personnel & Finance Committee.

B. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

All in attendance participated in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag, led by Mr. Thames.

C. OPENING REMARKS

Mr. Thames welcomed everyone to this pre-budget workshop, where the Superintendent is presenting the current services budget.

D. SUPERINTENDENT'S BUDGET PRESENTATION

Mr. Geary reviewed the Board of Education current services budget as if it is rolled over next year with the same services, but accounting for known and anticipated differences such as contractual salary increases, estimated increases to medical insurance, transportation and the like. Mr. Geary's presentation is available for view on the website. He reviewed that last year the budget approved by the Board of Directors was \$113,406,180, which represented a 1.5% increase from the prior year. The current services roll over budget to 19-20 currently stands at \$119,201,604, which is a 5.1% increase over the current budget. That amount represents the anticipated costs with no additional services or staffing for next year.

It was noted that with the closing of Washington School there is the potential to cut 4 FTE positions. However, with the additional students at Bennet, they are

looking to possibly add a team, so that would equal the 4 FTE positions, so it would be a net wash. The support staff from Washington will be absorbed by other buildings to provide support to students as they acclimate to new schools.

Mr. Geary pointed out that if the budget keeps getting cut to the point it has the past few years, with increases ranging from 0.75% to 2%, we will need to start losing programming at some point. We cannot maintain current programming at that level of funding.

Mr. Geary suggested several options to help reduce costs, including another early retirement incentive. He did note that this would be the last early retirement incentive for a while, at least until another building closes. Another option to help reduce transportation costs, or at least to help prevent additional costs of added buses, is to tweak the school start times to allow more times between school runs so additional buses are not needed. Last, Mr. Geary suggested the possibility of taking tuition students at the new Manchester Middle Academy, as Manchester Regional Academy does.

Mr. Geary reviewed the many grants that help fund the district, including:

Alliance \$4,317,896

Priority \$823,588

Title I \$1,621,938

IDEA \$1,640,748

MRA \$1,185,000

HFPG \$459,500

Barr Foundation \$300,000

Nellie Mae \$295,000

Also as a Priority District we receive:

Extended Hours Grant \$128,157

School Accountability/Summer School \$150,603

Mr. Thames stated this was a great starting point and he is interested to see how the budget gets whittled down while still allowing the district to perform at the same level.

Ms. Stefanovicz pointed out the \$119 million is solely tax dollars, but there is about \$10 million more in the budget covered by grant funding, so the total cost to run the district is closer to \$130 million.

Mr. Hughes noticed an uptick in the percentage of free/reduced lunch students this year and wondered if the fact that some schools have been made full school free/reduced lunch impacted those numbers. Mr. Geary explained that the new way to figure the percentages is calculated by the state and is a little off from the past way of counting.

Mr. Conyers wondered how the projected increase for contractual salary increases compared with prior years. Mr. Geary noted it has increased a bit and that contract negotiations across the state have been trending upwards.

Mr. Pattacini asked for clarity on how the \$382,000 MRA roof is being funded. Mr. Geary explained the General Manager reduced the Board budget by that amount and used bonding money from different roofing projects to fund that project.

Mr. Pattacini was concerned that some lines were flat funded, such as consultants. He worried that in the past those lines have been reduced, but if they are flat funded out of the gate there will be problems. Mr. Geary noted the struggle is the unknowns in the budget. In previous years some items have been able to be shifted to grant funding but some grants we simply do not know are coming, or what the funding will be, until the last minute. It makes planning difficult at best.

Mr. Pattacini feels the Priority Grant seems to have the most risk associated with it. He wondered if we know the amount we get for two years and how we are chosen. Dr. Radikas explained that the state calculates Priority districts based on both performance and on the number of students that qualify for free/reduced lunch. There are 11 priority districts, and we just beat out Bristol for the #11 spot. We will not know until the last minute whether we will fall to #12 in the next count. Dr. Radikas noted it was difficult to plan summer school on such short notice when we did not know funds were coming, and then they had to be spent in a short amount of time. Luckily, she has a great staff to assist her in this task. Mr. Geary agreed, it requires flexibility.

Mr. Pattacini shared concerns on the timing of the grant and the unknown amount. Mr. Geary noted the funding should remain the same if we qualify, but we will not know if we are a Priority District until the list comes out.

Mr. Pattacini noted we have no control over CREC possibly raising tuition. We budget that line flat, but really have no idea. If that line increases, the overall budget may in fact be closer to a 6% increase instead of 5%. These are things we cannot do without, such as salaries, transportation and tuition. Mr. Pattacini feels it is helpful for the community and the Board of Directors to see where we are coming from as we start the budget process. He thanked the Superintendent for his work. Mr. Geary noted that these numbers will move, but we have to start somewhere and this is typically where he starts, but this is the first time he has brought these numbers to the Board members and the public.

Mr. Scappaticci wondered if the possibility of opening MMA to tuition students would draw as much tuition income as MRA does. Mr. Geary noted MRA is a longstanding, well-respected program and MMA is brand new, so he does not anticipate the same level of tuition students at this time.

Mr. Thames asked for an explanation of how changing start times at schools would help save money in the transportation line. Mr. Geary noted that right now the schools are staggered with start times, but if there was a bit more time between schools it might be possible to reduce the number of buses used, or at least not require additional buses to make the runs. It would mean less buses running behind as well. Mr. Thames wondered the process that would be followed in changing school times. Mr. Geary noted that the first step would be to consult the bus company and bring the topic to the Board. He is thinking of incremental changes, such as 5 minutes. It is nothing major, so the impact to parents should be minimal.

Mr. Thames wondered when we find out about CREC tuition amounts. Mr. Geary stated usually we find out in April or May, after our budget is set.

Mr. Thames wondered if we are able to increase the tuition we charge at MRA. Mr. Geary noted we do increase tuition a little, but we do not want to increase too much or other districts will not send their students. MRA is a well respected program and we do not want to price it out of districts comfort zone.

Mr. Thames asked about the United Way grant. Mr. Geary explained this year we had a \$25,000 planning grant and Ms. Gomero is writing the proposal currently. If the grant is received, the middle school would benefit by about \$100,000 in additional resources. Mr. Thames thanked the United Way, The Hartford Foundation, The Barr Foundation, and The Nellie Mae Foundation for their contribution to Manchester Public Schools.

Ms. Stefanovicz wants to take a look at the net current expenditure per pupil, which usually comes out in the winter, in comparison to other districts our size and demographic. She noted that although our contract rose, it is still below state average.

Mr. Meggers feels we need to have a frank discussion with Dattco about our needs. Mr. Geary noted the topic will be discussed in a Personnel & Finance meeting.

E. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Tom Stringfellow, 183 Hillstown Road, thought Mr. Geary made a good presentation. Mr. Stringfellow spoke about how race and culture will impact a school closing and the students transfer to new schools. He hopes all students are welcomed and noted that all students learn different ways. Mr. Stringfellow

recommended an article on race. He also noted there are different types of parents, including same sex parents. He hopes students of color are getting into gifted programs and are pushed to excel in school and made to feel welcome. He also hopes parents of color are joining the PTA.

F. CLOSING COMMENTS

Mr. Thames thanked the Superintendent for his presentation and the Board members for their thoughtful input. He noted there will be several budget workshops after the holidays and in the meantime the public should feel free to email the Superintendent with any questions or concerns as the Board wants to hear their input on the budget.

G. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 7:13 p.m. (Pattacini/Scappaticci 8/0)

Respectfully submitted,

Darryl Thames, Snr.
Board Secretary