East Greenwich School Committee

Finance and Revenue Committee

Minutes of 2/26/2024 Meeting

Agenda Item 1: Changes to State Education Aid Computation.

Finance Director Maggie Baker talked about the impact of proposed changes to the calculation of the Core Instruction Amount. Currently this is computed as an average of core instruction expenses per pupil across four New England states (RI, CT, MA, NH). She said Tim Duffy of RIASC told her they may cap the increase in the core instruction amount.Last year the core instruction amount went up 7% last year. Districts with a lot of state aid saw a 7% increase to most of their revenue. Our percentage of state aid is smaller, so we get less benefit. This means we will be gradually falling behind if we are restricted to appropriation increases in the 2-2.5% range. We did get an increase in high cost special education categorical aid. Mrs. Baker mentioned that urban districts are losing a lot of revenue because the ESSR funds they received during the pandemic are no longer available.

Agenda Item 2: Discussion of funding request presentation and priorities.

Dr. Ricca suggested that we should have a simple presentation containing revenue and expenses. Emphasize that more than 80% of our operating expenses is people costs, so we could cut the paper budget to practically zero and it would not move the needle much.Our job is to make a strong case for the things we request. We noted that according to census data East Greenwich has more than a billion dollars of income each year, so a $40,000,000 school appropriation represents about 4% of the total income. It was pointed out that providing free, high quality public education for 4% of total income was good value for the taxpayer's dollar.

Dr. Ricca stated that East Greenwich is one of the few towns gaining in both population and school enrollment, and residents want high quality schools. A champagne taste and beer pocketbook approach won't work, we have to tell our story about where money will go, and we have to make an airtight case for spending it there.

The idea of an itemized bill showing the cost impact of mandated and statutory obligations, as well as contractually required increases. Then it would show requested additional expenditures that were not required but were highly desirable, in top-down priority order.

It was agreed that this would be a valuable tool to make the case for our funding requests.

There was a discussion of the reduction in investment in public education across the board from 2010 until the present. Even with the increase in state aid, East Greenwich received about 15% less revenue from the state and local governments. On the pre-2010 trajectory, there would have been an additional $140 million in revenue since 2010.

Dr. Ricca stated that in the current environment, annual increases of no less than 3.5% or

3.75% are required, because the bargaining units will expect raises in line with what other districts and town employees are receiving. Because the increases have been in the 2%-2.5%, we are understaffed and that is producing burnout as professionals struggle to cover

for absences because we are spread so thin. In spite of this, every school showed improvement on standardized tests, and five of our six school received 5-star ratings. The sixth moved up from three to four stars.

Agenda Item 3: Predictive Analytics for the School Appropriation

Dr. Quinn presented a model for the school appropriation that fit the observed data well. Where possible, it's predictions were compared to those of the town's five year forecast, and were generally closer to what was actually observed. There was some discussion of the Bayesian paradigm of starting with a preliminary idea of what the data should look like called the prior distribution, and refine it iteratively as data becomes available.

It was decided to try to coordinate our forecasting with the town's so that we don't end up with two competing forecasts.

Minutes submitted by Gene Quinn, Subcommittee Chair