

MINUTES OF FISCAL
COMMITTEE MEETING
OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Stamford, Connecticut
May 21, 2009

The Fiscal Committee Meeting of the Board of Education was held on May 21, 2009 at the Government Center, 888 Washington Boulevard. The meeting was called to order at 7:20 p.m. by Ms. Heftman, Chairperson, with the following Committee members present: Ms. Heftman, Mr. King, Mr. Mathews, and Ms. Nabel (arrived at 7:40 pm). Absent: Mr. Rubino. Also in attendance: Ms. Lahiri-Hoherchak, Ms. Wade, Dr. Starr, Dr. Hamilton, Ms. Nicholson, Ms. Gagne, Ms. Karwan, Mr. Murphy, four representatives from the SEA, two representatives from the ESEA, a representative from the Advocate, and approximately 21 guests.

Ms. Heftman indicated that this meeting was being held in order to reallocate the operating budget for 2009-2010.

Dr. Starr distributed a draft of possible Board of Education options which he reviewed. He noted that our original budget was a 3.75% increase that the Board of Education approved in February noting that \$850,000 of that was OPEB (Other Post Employment Benefits) so the increase was really about 3.2% or 3.3% which is the lowest budget that has been presented in decades. Since then we have been cut by the other Boards to the tune of \$7.4M which brings our increase down to .37%. The original budget cut around the edges of everything and that will be his approach with the cuts this evening. We did not cut any staff positions in the original budget. Unfortunately, with another \$7.4M loss there is no way to not cut some positions. He also noted that he has received some information that will change these numbers and will discuss this later in the meeting and will provide a revised copy of the document he distributed this evening.

Dr. Starr reviewed the cuts and noted that the reductions shown here are the reductions that have been made after February 12, 2009 as there had already been reductions in different areas and we are not showing those reductions as they already appear in the budget book. He then answered questions from Board members relating to the additional cuts.

Dr. Starr noted that the Educational Assistants union, under the leadership of Cathy Coppola, came to him and offered to give up \$200.00 each in their salary next year which is about 1%. We are working out the details since there are some pension issues and it is not a done deal. We are estimating about \$55,000-\$60,000 in savings. He noted that he was very appreciative of this offer.

The SAU has agreed to increase their deductible for insurance. Their contract has them at 17% this year and 18% next year and they have agreed to go up to 19% this year, 19% next year, and then the first year of their next contract would also start at 19%. This will give us approximately \$20,000. These additional funds will most likely go into the contingency fund since we know that we will need a couple of contingency positions.

Ms. Nabel arrived at 7:40 pm.

Ms. Heftman made the point that this was a huge cut that we have to absorb. Dr. Starr and his staff have done everything they could possible think of that will help us absorb that cut and minimizing staff reductions as much as we can. On behalf of the Fiscal Committee she thanked the MAA, UAW, ESEA, and SAU to helping to try to save as many positions as we can.

Ms. Nabel apologized for being late and asked for a review of the retirements we anticipate among principals and assistant principals this year. Dr. Starr noted that there are 3 principal positions and 3 assistant principals. Ms. Nabel noted that we don't have much of an ability to reduce administrator positions and recognize at least the first year any budget savings, but should she conclude that Dr. Starr is not recommended not filling any of the retirements at the assistant principal level. Dr. Starr indicated he would recommend filling all 3 of those positions. Ms. Nabel recommended that the Board think about not filling 1 or 2 of the assistant principal positions and recognizing that that it reduces the adult to student ratio, recognizing that it removes another opportunity for students to interact with educators, and recognizing also that the SAU has, and we are very grateful for the concession that they made, but her personal opinion is that this is an item she would consider as a reduction. She also thanked the Educational Assistants for their concession and noted that this is a difficult time and that it was a difficult sacrifice which the Board appreciates. Ms. Heftman asked Dr. Starr that when he is doing the evaluations of assistant principals could he tell the Board if there has been a decrease in the staff levels of the middle schools because we have to keep in mind that the assistant principals and the principals are all involved in evaluating and what that would do to that process if we eliminated one.

Dr. Starr also reviewed the ARRA funding and distributed a chart of preliminary projections which still needs to be approved by the State Department of Education into three areas over two years which are Title I, IDEA, and Stimulus. Stimulus is what we will be receiving through ECS.

Dr. Starr announced that Scofield Magnet Middle School received a Technology Grant in the amount of \$265,000 and we are also very actively pursuing the Magnet School of America grant which could be up to \$1M a year for a couple of schools. Ms. Heftman inquired about another program that is part of the ARRA which is called "Race to the Top." Dr. Starr indicated that we do not have information on this program yet, but will pursue when it becomes available.

Mr. King moved, seconded by Mr. Mathews to adjourn the meeting at 8:04 p.m. with the following Committee members voting in favor: Ms. Heftman, Mr. King, Mr. Mathews, and Ms. Nabel.

Joshua P. Starr, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools
Executive Officer