

16-C

City Council Budget Committee  
Education Budget  
Thursday, April 14, 2011, 7:15 PM

Chair Colleen Stanley called the meeting to order at 7:20pm.

**PRESENT WERE COMMITTEE MEMBERS:**

Colleen Stanley, Chair, Robert Arconti, Nancy Deep-Damici, Robert Riley, Fred Visconti,  
Ex Officio members: Mary Teicholz, Paul Rotello, Ben Chianese, and Phil Curran.

**ALSO PRESENT:** Mark Boughton, Mayor; David St. Hilaire, Director of Finance; Dr. Sal Pascarella, Superintendent of Schools; Irving Fox, Chair Board of Education, Robert J. Taborsak, Board of Education Member, and Richard M. Janelli, Board of Education Member.

Interested members of the public were present.

**ABSENT:** Elio Longo, Director of Finance-Schools, due to a scheduled family vacation.

Chair Stanley began the meeting with introductions and stating the purpose of the meeting was to review the proposed school budget. She noted that there was a public hearing scheduled for April 20, 2011. Chair Stanley then asked Mayor Boughton to address the Committee regarding the education budget.

Mayor Boughton discussed the need to meet the obligations to the tax payers and provide for the education of its students. He stated that the education budget has increased for the past 5 years and this year he is proposing an increase as well. However, given the current economic climate, city officials have a responsibility to keep the increase at a minimum so that residents can stay in their homes. He reviewed historical foreclosure information, permits expectations and other economic information for the city and state. He informed the committee that the city has 46 vacancies outside of the schools, which he is proposing not to fund in the 2011-2012 budget. He discussed property evaluations and the appeal process, which decreases the grand list. He concluded by stating that he and his staff are working daily with the school officials to find cost saving measures. Mr. St. Hilaire added that the city and the schools have been working together on projects that will avoid costs in the future, like the dual fuel and boiler replacement projects.

Chair Stanley then asked Dr. Pascarella to give the committee an update on the solar energy project. Dr. Pascarella stated that coming to the City Council with the solar project was a good example from the Board of Education and the City Council working together to reduce costs for the taxpayers. Dr. Pascarella then discussed the current budget proposal and the impact on the schools. He stated that the teachers have reached a 1 year agreement that has no salary increase. He also discussed other areas in which reductions could be made including eliminating all day kindergarten; reducing administrators, reducing staff development, reducing funds for text books, decreasing the number of languages taught at the middle schools, and staff reductions in guidance, tutors, paraprofessionals, and secretaries. Mr. Fox added that the Board of Education finds themselves in a very difficult position as funding is not increasing while the requirements of state and federal government and the accreditation organizations are increasing. Eliminating faculty hinders meeting these goals. A discussion of the requirements of No Child Left Behind occurred. Dr. Pascarella and the committee then continued to discuss the impact of the proposed budget. Mr. Fox stated that in addition to increased requirements enrollment is also increasing.

Chair Stanley then asked if the committee had any questions. Mr. Riley stated that in a year when Social Security, Disabled Veterans, and Retired teachers/administrator payment are all zero, he is questioning putting

the solar panel project on this year's budget. Mr. St. Hilaire stated that the solar panels were not part of the operating budget and were a cost avoidance measure which would be paid for over the next 12 years.

Mayor Boughton stated that the City Council has been very supportive of the teachers and the students of Danbury. He noted that the current Medical Benefit and Pension systems are draining the funds that are needed to teach students. Currently most of the employees are not contributing anything to these and that is not sustainable. He is committed to working with Dr. Pascarella and the Board of Education.

Mr. Arconti asked Dr. Pascarella to concisely explain what the schools would lose if the proposed budget was passed. Dr. Pascarella reviewed the items previously discussed, including universal half-day kindergarten, reducing foreign languages in middle schools, reducing tech education in the middle schools, eliminating 3 positions at the high school, eliminating one school psychologist, reducing staff in the guidance area, reducing administrative hours in the Reach and Endeavor program, Special Education and Athletics. A discussion of these ensued.

Mr. Arconti asked Mr. Fox what the current total funding level is with state and federal dollars. Mr. Fox stated they currently have an additional \$3 million in federal dollars and \$20million in state funding. A discussion of ARRA and state funding ensued. Mayor Boughton stated that the state budget is a work in progress and there may be a need to review the budget and make cuts. Further discussion of the proposed state budget occurred.

Mrs. Deep-Damici asked if savings could be gained from using electronic text books. Mr. Fox stated that the licensing fees are equivalent to cost of the books

Mr. Visconti asked Dr. Pascarella to discuss the bus overcrowding issue. Dr. Pascarella stated that they are looking at ways to improve the situation.

Chair Stanley asked how coaches were paid and if the union contract has an impact on these amounts. Dr. Pascarella stated that union agreements do include a list of stipends. Mr. Fox stated while they cannot control the amount paid to coaches they can eliminate sports.

Mr. Arconti asked how much of the position eliminations could be handled through attrition. Ms. Thompson stated that they have received 6 notices of retirement but the deadline had not occurred. Further discussion regarding seniority and unemployment payments took place.

Chair Stanley then opened the discussion to the public beginning with Ex Officio members. She stated that as the hour was getting late, she would take a few comments but reminded those present that there is a public hearing on the matter on Wednesday, April 20, 2011, 7:00 pm.

Mr. Rotello asked about the educational output. Dr. Pascarella stated that placement at 4-year colleges is 74%, when you add 2 year schools the post high school placement rate is 86%. Danbury has one of the lowest drop-out rates in the state. The Advanced Placement program has received a national award for the number and level of students. Dr. Pascarella continued that they do quite well with students who come in the district and stay. The mobility rate is 30% and there are a number of schools that have not demonstrated Adequate Yearly Progress.

Mr. Chianese asked when the City Council would see real savings from the efforts of the City and the BOE working together.

Helga Jensen-Ruopp spoke about the need to maintain funding for the art, music, business, tech, and consumer education programs.

Mr. Janelli asked the City Council to understand the education success is built over several years and cutting the budget will have an impact over future years. He also spoke about the Adopt a School program. Finally, he stated that the current economic situation was not a City Council or school problem, but a community problem.

Mr. Maloney spoke about the need to maintain Head Start funding.

Chair Stanley then entertained a motion on the proposed education budget. **Robert Arconti moved to recommend to the City Council the approval and adoption of the Mayor's proposed education budget unless there were changes in the current state aid. The motion was seconded by Fred Visconti.** Mr. Riley spoke about the current budget. Vote, all in favor, motion unanimously approved.

There being no further business on the agenda Fred Visconti made a motion which was seconded by Nancy Deep-Damici to adjourn the meeting. Vote, all in favor, motion unanimously approved. The meeting adjourned at 9:20 pm.

Respectfully Submitted

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Colleen Stanley, Chair

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Robert Arconti

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Nancy Deep-Damici

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Robert Riley

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Fred Visconti