

City Council Committee

Education - Budget

Tuesday, April 21, 2015

Chairman Warren Levy called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. on Tuesday, April 21, 2015, in the Caucus Room, 3rd Floor, Danbury City Hall, 155 Deer Hill Avenue. Present were Committee members Michael Haddad, Joseph Scozzafava, Gregg Seabury, Fred Visconti; and Ex-Officio Members Joe Cavo, Phil Curran, and Paul Rotello. Also present were representatives as follows: Les Pinter, Deputy Corporation Counsel, David St. Hilaire, Director of Finance, Dr. Sal Pascarella, Superintendent of Schools, William Glass, Deputy Superintendent, Joe Martino, Schools Director of Finance, Kim Thompson, Schools Director of Human Resources and Legal Counsel, Board of Education Chair Eileen Alberts and Members, Gladys Cooper, Michael Ferguson, Richard Jannelli, Robert Taborsak, David Metrena.

Mr. Levy began with background information. Mr. Levy noted that tax payers have always made education number 1 priority and on average have given 3.3% increase over the last 10 budgets. He discussed bonds as well as stagnant family wages. This proposed budget is 52.3% of the total City budget and it is the Committees task is to ensure taxpayers money is spent wisely. Mr. than asked the Superintendent and School Finance Director for an overview and committee members asked questions.

The 2014/2015 budget is \$121,581,291. The budget requested for 2015/2016 is \$127,529,440. This is a 4.89% increase, \$5,948,149. The Mayor has proposed a budget for 2015/2016 of \$124,000,000. This is a 2.3% increase, \$2,204,709.

Dr. Pascarella provided an overview of the requested budget. He discussed the focus on student engagement and readiness for college. Mr. Pascarella noted increased enrollment, Common Core standards, arts, technology, science, an educated workforce and the local economy. He discussed challenges including State Aid, various frozen funding levels, and increasing numbers of schools. Funding per student was pointed out, as was special education, English learners, the reduced lunch program, operations, State Mandated programs and training, and security. Dr. Pascarella highlighted numerous awards and achievements by the schools.

Mr. Martino discussed measures for cost containment in health insurance, energy efficiency, transportation assessments, classroom consolidations, special education, public and private grants, purchasing, maintenance and technology. He provided an overview of where their funds go with 66% of the allocation going into classrooms, 5% transportation, 5% student services, 3% instruction, 7% plant, and 9% administration.

Mr. Martino discussed details of where the funds are going line by line including where there have been increases and decreases including:

Total full time salaries: \$73,000,000. This is an increase of \$3.3 million, a 4.79% increase. Retirements at 20 per year were projected at \$35,000 per year. 3.0 Elementary teacher/enrollment, .5 Early College Coordinator, 2 Middle School Instructional Coaches, 1.5 Special Education Teacher, 1.0 Psychologist, 1 Nurse, .6 Social Worker, Total Support Staff and Subs \$69,000 increase.

Employee Benefits is \$26 million, a \$1.4 million increase, 5.91%. Groups on HSAs saw a decrease in claims and ER visits, 4% increase in generics, and a drop in refills. Worker's Compensation is increased. Services and Fees: \$4.9 million an increase of \$408,000 mainly Special Education Tutors. Utility and Repairs: \$1 million. This is a \$62,000 increase, 6.12% mainly Sacred Heart Early Childhood Education. There is a 2% increase in the current refuse account. He noted savings from LED and energy retrofit.

Transportation: \$12 million, a \$637,000 increase 5.5%. Three additional buses were needed. Special Education Transportation increased as well. Special Education Tuition increased in DFC placements which are mandated.

6000 Accounts: Fuel prices have fallen significantly a \$63,000 drop and fuel and heating drop of \$41,000.

Library books: \$146,000 cut. Equipment: \$150,000 lease for elementary; \$750,000 lease overall. There are 5 active leases.

Fees Adult Education: \$548,000 is a 0% increase.

Dr. Pascarella and Mr. Martino responded to questions regarding the cost difference between retirees and entree level new hires, special education, health insurance, classroom numbers. It was also noted that the ECS grant to Danbury was \$31,679,164.00 including the Alliance District Grant of \$6,696,567.00 million. In comparisons to other communities it is disproportionally Low. No increases in the ECS grant were projected in this budget.

The alliance grant is capped, the summer school grant loss, and the cost energy efficiencies studying joining with the City to reduce redundancies has ended.

Mr. Levy asked the Superintendent for his comments on the Blum Shapiro report on recommendations for potential cost savings. The Superintendent said he was not prepared to comment at this time.

A motion was made by Councilman Seabury seconded by Councilman Scozzafava, to recommend that the City Council adopt the Mayor's proposed Education budget for the year 2015/2016 of \$124,000,000 and \$208,575 for Health and Welfare. The motion passed unanimously. motion was made by Councilman Seabury and seconded by Councilman Scozzafava to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed unanimously at 7:10 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Warren Levy, Chairman

Michael Haddad

Joseph Scozzafava

Gregg Seabury

Frederick Visconti