

The Education Budget committee met March 20, 2007 at 7:30 in the Third Floor Caucus Room in City Hall. In attendance were Chairman Mary Saracino and committee members, Colleen Stanley, Fred Visconti, Jane Diggs and Bob Riley.

Also in attendance were council members Joe Cavo and Shay Nagarsheth and Mayor Boughton, ex officio. Representing the city was Assistant Director of Finance Dan Garrick. Representing the Board of Education were Director of Finance Elio Longo, Superintendent Sal Pascarella and school board members Richard Janelli and Irving Fox and members of the public. Councilman Paul Rotello arrived at 7:45.

Mrs. Saracino asked Mr. Longo to make his presentation. Mr. Longo said that the Board of Education approved a \$107,101,888 budget. The major cost estimates are in the areas of utilities, transportation, health care and the magnet school operations. Most of their expenses, approximately 80 cents on the dollar, are contractual expenses tied to various contracts.

Dr. Pascarella thanked the committee for inviting them to the meeting. He stated that salary and benefits make up approximately 70% of the budget. He stated that there are grants that help, although Title one money is in jeopardy. It is based on income and need. There is a shift in demographics in town – six of our schools have free or reduced lunch. The Headstart funding is in jeopardy also and they are looking for other venues of income. The Magnet School had 40 open seats and we lost funding and start up cost funds. The city of Danbury is optimum funding for us... He stated that if Governor Rell's budget passes, they will get grant funds. He anticipates that the Magnet School will be at capacity by next year and that retirements will help allowing for the hiring of new teachers at a lower wage. He feels that the budget is about what other cities are using.

Mr. Janelli spoke in favor of the Magnet School. He stated that they have start up costs right now and will become fully funded. There is a possibility that Ridgefield and Bethel will join. The school is a source of pride for Danbury.

Mr. Fox said that it took about 4-5 months to put the budget together after Mr. Longo's work. It represents the costs of going forward.

Dr, Pascarella said that they have put a limit on forming new classes. There are five new positions district wide, 3.5 of them at the Magnet school. He may move some responsibilities around. Overall he felt that they would do fine with the money they are asking for.

Mayor Boughton said that the Board of Education's actual request was for a 7.1% increase. The City reduced it by \$1,000,000 using the salary gap between the teachers retiring and new hires to create a buffer. As for the governor's funding, she is proposing to give Danbury \$5.1 million and we are giving the schools \$6.1 million. If the governor doesn't give the city the money, we will have to readjust. The State works on their budget during May and our charter says that we have to have a budget by May 1st. The current proposal by the governor has an increase to education. We may want to pass a resolution asking Hartford to fund education. About 50% of the state's budget is based on the governor's numbers. The numbers will have to be closely reviewed once they come from Hartford.

Ms. Saracino asked for questions from committee members. Mr. Riley asked Dr. Pascarella about the population bulge at the middle schools and if staffing will be a problem. Dr. Pascarella said that middle to high school is the problem. Classes fill up and they are staffed to the top. A full time teacher at the middle school may have 7 period/day. Over 180 days, people are teaching the same amount of days and the same number of students.

Mr. Visconti asked how many students are at Rogers Park Middle School. It was stated that there are 1,103. He also asked if there were any current ongoing contractual negotiations. Dr. Pascarella said not at this time. They are in the first year of a three year contract with the teachers' union. Mr. Longo responded that they are currently open with the secretarial group and that they are in the middle year of the custodian's contract. The busing contract has one more year. They are going out for RFP's on the bus contract this summer.

Mrs. Diggs asked if the magnet school would always remain a K-5 model. She also asked that if we're lacking in student recruitment for the school, how they would propose to bring in more students. She also asked how diverse the school population was.

Dr. Pascarella said the student makeup reflects the City's diversity as in our other schools. It brings other towns in line with the diversity reflected in Danbury. They are in compliance. The school was built as a k-5 school and it can change. There is a magnet school advisory board for the Danbury Board of Education that would make that decision. As for recruiting, the principal does presentations at each of the schools. They need other towns to fulfill their numbers. Brookfield got all of their students in and Ridgefield is very interested.

Mr. Visconti asked if there is an overall increase in teacher's problems or impact with the immigration issue in Danbury. Dr. Pascarella said that there is a bulge with additional students. Immigration enriches diversity, but also takes away resources and they are not in compliance with teacher ratios. There is a need to put students into programs.

Mrs. Diggs moved to approve the Education budget as presented by the city. Seconded by Mr. Visconti. Ms. Saracino said that the budget allocated \$106,061,881. Mr. Riley said that it's a good budget and he appreciated the Board of Education working with the City.

Motion passed unanimously.

Mrs. Stanley moved to adjourn. Seconded by Mr.Visconti. Motion passed unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 8:10 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Saracino, Chair

Colleen Stanley

Jane Diggs

Robert Riley

Fred Visconti