

**COVENTRY BOARD OF EDUCATION
APPROVED MINUTES
SPECIAL MEETING OF THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2008**

Members Present: Larry Pietrantonio, Chairman
 Kathleen Ryan, Vice Chairman
 Cheryl Trudon, Secretary
 John Barrett
 Mary Kortmann
 Michael Whitham
 Richard Williams

Administrators Present: Dr. Donna Bernard, Superintendent
 Sherry Holmes, Fiscal Services Director

Also present were Judith Richard, Pupil and Staff Support Services Director; Paul Noel, Director of Physical Plant and Facilities; Troy Hopkins, CHS Principal; Wil Duchesneau, CHS Assistant Principal; Michele Mullaly, CNH Interim Principal; David Petrone, GHR Principal; Raymond Grasso, CGS Principal; a few Contemporary Issues students; and a few citizens. The Chronicle newspaper was represented. All motions are directed to the Coventry Board of Education.

I. CALL TO ORDER

By: Chairman, L. Pietrantonio Time: 7:31 p.m.
Place: Administration Building Conference Room

II. SALUTE THE FLAG

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by L. Pietrantonio.

III. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS

Barbara Riordan of 855 Merrow Road spoke in support of the proposed curriculum specialist position. She said she was surprised that there were suggestions at recent meetings that the district could do without the position. She added that Dr. Bernard and staff have worked very hard in absence of the position and with everything she has learned, this position is a necessity, especially based on the NEASC [New England Association of Schools and Colleges] report. She said she had done quick research of surrounding towns and most districts have at least one curriculum coordinator.

Jen Beausoleil of 221 Eastview Drive said she has come to the Board for years as an advocate for the schools. She said the tech-ed position has come on and off the budget for years and the district owes the middle school students the experience of hands-on skills and the same experiences of other students in other districts. She continued she is disheartened that the reading assistant at the grammar school is on a “wish” list, when reading is the core to all learning and the grammar school is where you learn to read. She said this should be on the “need to have” list. She respectfully requested that the staff positions of tech-ed and reading, which have the greatest return to the students, be added to the final budget. She said these give the children the basic skills to be successful students and adults.

Dena DeJulius of 46 Eastview Drive commented she just recently heard that Coventry does not have a Curriculum Coordinator. She said she is the math coordinator for Manchester Public Schools. She said not having at least one curriculum coordinator in the district really troubles her.

Susan Dolan of 42 Zeya Drive said she was present to advocate for the challenge and enrichment program. She said Coventry does a great job in serving the students who are struggling, but there is not much available for the ones that are excelling and need further challenges. She said the need is there for an additional challenge and enrichment teacher and it isn't fair for the schools to have to share.

Deborah Pasini of 356 Woodmont Drive requested that the bus drivers be trained in the use of EPI pens. She said her son has a severe allergy and she is concerned he may not be safe riding on the bus.

Lisa Decker of 232 Wrights Mill Road said she was here to implore the Board to pass the budget with everything listed as the "wish list." She said the curriculum coordinator is the final inspector and overseer of the curriculum. She spoke to the tech-ed program and how important it is for kinesthetic learners and for those who aren't because they still need to be exposed to those skills. She addressed the challenge and enrichment teacher and how the district needs more creative ideas outside of the classroom and also the necessity of the athletic trainer. She said she believes a full-time reading para-educator would not be requested if it was not needed. She said the principals and administrators are fabulous and asked the Board to listen to their requests. She said the PTO groups raise thousands of dollars for various items, but the PTO can't buy people, it is the town's responsibility to provide adequate staff.

IX. OLD BUSINESS

Discussion and VOTE: FY 2009 Budget

K. Ryan addressed the Board and noted there have been additional items of information received this week. She spoke to the revision of the addition/reduction analysis spreadsheet, which included savings due to insurance rates.

MOTION: The Coventry Board of Education approve the proposed budget as outlined in the draft addition/reduction analysis spreadsheet dated February 4, 2008, using the third column, making the bottom line budget \$23,361,439 an increase of 4.9%.

By: K. Ryan

Seconded: C. Trudon

Discussion: J. Barrett asked R Williams to read portions of a prepared statement, which included an amendment to the main motion. The full statement is attached to these minutes. The amendment to the main motion read as follows:

PRIMARY AMENDMENT: To make the following changes:

Add in:

Tech Ed Supplies – CNH @ \$2,000

Musical Instrument – CNH @ \$1,450

M. Whitham asked why the small amount like extra curricular support 3-8 was taken out. Dr. Bernard responded it was an attempt to stay under 5%.

M. Whitham continued that he was in favor of adding the tech-ed teacher, tech-ed supplies, the CNH instruments, and the extra curricular support 3-8. He asked Ms. Mullaly if there was another tech-ed teacher at the middle school. Ms. Mullaly replied there is a partial program in place covered by a teacher with cross certification, who is also covering other classes, but there is not a full-time program at this time.

Dr. Bernard asked for clarification; did M. Whitham want to add those items instead of others or in addition to others. M. Whitman said he has heard strong arguments that the curriculum specialist is needed, but he believes not yet and it is a lot of money to put towards salary and then benefits for that position. He said that money could be better spent on the other items.

K. Ryan asked for clarification regarding the noted cost of \$68,716 for the curriculum specialist; does it include benefits and salary. Ms. Holmes confirmed the \$68,716 included benefits and salary.

M. Whitham continued, since there isn't a full-time tech-ed program at CNH and since the curriculum coordination is being fulfilled right now by a number of people, he would rather support the tech-ed program.

J. Barrett said he agreed with what M. Whitham said regarding the tech-ed program and the curriculum specialist. He said he is trying to compromise and he wants CGS to get the reading para-educator. He wondered if the para-educators could be realigned to provide CGS with the reading para-educator needed there. Dr. Bernard replied that CGS will be losing the para-educator to GHR due to realignment because of grant compliance issues. J. Barrett asked if the health insurance, for the para-educators covered in grants, was also paid for by the grant. Ms. Holmes replied it depends if the health insurance cost was written into the grant. J. Barrett said he was concerned that the staff paid for by grants is not reflected in the BOE budget. Dr. Bernard responded that the monthly fiscal services report reflects the grant amounts. K. Ryan added that employees and expenses listed in this budget are items for which the Board is requesting the Town to pay. She continued that although the grants are part of our school system, this budget needs to reflect what we are asking from the Town. J. Barrett said the grant money comes in and goes out and the Board is responsible for it and he would like to see it included as an attachment.

C. Trudon wanted clarification on how column three was finalized for the Board's review; don't the administrators decide what is presented in column three? She then said the administrators are the ones who run the schools and know what is needed and they get together and decide what to present to the Board. Dr. Bernard said column three is a combination of many discussions.

M. Whitham asked if the administrators feel the curriculum specialist is more important than the other items listed. Mr. Hopkins commented on his concerns regarding the NEASC recommendations for improvement in curriculum and instruction and that the district should have someone to oversee curriculum and provide the insurance of quality.

He said without the curriculum specialist he is worried it won't be good enough when it needs to be.

M. Whitham thanked Mr. Hopkins for his comment and if the administrators feel it is that important he could change his mind. Ms. Mullaly said she appreciated the awareness of the needs for tech-ed and she is conflicted because she truly wants both items. She agreed that the people working on the curriculum project are doing a great job, but the district does need a wider view, because curriculum is always ongoing. She said she has a personal concern with what is happening at the state level with mandates and standards. She added it would be extremely helpful in guiding decision making, beyond the ABC work, to have that expertise to lean on. She said having a curriculum specialist is more than the ABC work, the district's curriculum is what we want students to know, it is the content and skills we teach.

M. Whitham asked if there was anyway to find more money in the budget to pay for the other things in columns one and two that are really needed. He said he believes there is money there that can pay for those items. Dr. Bernard responded there may be a few extra dollars as the year goes by and that is where the priority list would come in. L. Pietrantonio added if new money is found, a priority list could be addressed without raising the bottom line of the budget.

Dr. Bernard said a reorganization of a few things can be done to pay for the smaller items totaling under \$5,000, and stay at a 4.9% increase.

J. Barrett asked what was preventing the schools from buying the bass clarinet this school year. Dr. Bernard replied the district has been put on notice for critical spending only.

M. Kortmann reiterated that the high school buys their own instruments through fundraising and suggested the middle school attempt to do the same.

C. Trudon asked if the amounts for the safety and chemical hygiene officers were stipends or for training and/or supplies. Mr. Noel responded the amounts are stipends for employees to oversee the related issues.

M. Kortmann asked if NEASC sited CHS for the lack of a chemical hygiene plan. Mr. Hopkins responded yes and that would be one of the duties of that officer.

J. Barrett said the Board is using the one time fund in insurance saving to buy salaries and asked how those salaries would be funded the next fiscal year. R. Williams agreed with J. Barrett. Dr. Bernard responded if the district continues to have low claims, the state continues to be active in bidding, and people are able to move to HAS insurance there should be appropriate funding.

J. Barrett asked why the full amount of the bus was not added to column three. S. Holmes responded that the district will continue to lease next year if needed. She added the transportation contract with 1st Student is up in June 2009 and the contract will be put out to bid and renegotiated with our needs.

R. Williams stated in adding these salary costs, they will need to be funded in the next fiscal year, which will mean an increase of 8% or 9% for FY10. C. Trudon disagreed and said the Board has not had that high of an increase since Dr. Bernard has been here and it wasn't fair to assume it would happen next year.

L. Pietrantonio asked if there was anymore discussion on the main motion.

M. Whitham stated he wished the Board had another week for review and discussion. L. Pietrantonio reminded the Board the Town Manager has requested the Board's budget totals by February 15, so there is not enough time to continue discussions. Further he stated there has been plenty of discussion and opportunity, but now is the time if there are any other comments to be made.

Hearing none, L. Pietrantonio asked for the main motion to be read again.

"The Coventry Board of Education approve the proposed budget as outlined in the draft addition/reduction analysis spreadsheet dated February 4, 2008, using the third column, making the bottom line budget \$23,361,439 an increase of 4.9%."

L. Pietrantonio called for the vote.

Result: Motion passes (4-2-1)

L. Pietrantonio, K. Ryan, C. Trudon, and M. Kortmann – IN FAVOR

J. Barrett, R. Williams – OPPOSED

M. Whitham – ABSTAINS

M. Whitham wanted the record to show he believes the money is in the budget if only looked for a bit harder.

Dr. Bernard stated she understands the Board's wishes and should resources be found, she would keep the Board apprised.

XII. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: To adjourn the Board meeting at 8:45 p.m.

By: K. Ryan

Seconded: C. Trudon

Result: Motion passes unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Kimberlee Michaud
Board Clerk

February 28, 2008
Approved

Statement prepared and submitted by Board of Education member John Barrett.

Unfortunately due to a medical procedure I will not be able to participate verbally at an audible level during this evening's meeting. I have prepared the following statement regarding the proposed budget.

This has been a challenging budget process. The superintendent's budget we were given was not to the same level of detail boards of the past have enjoyed even though technology has made it easier to disseminate more information with ease and paperless. If anything our budget should show greater financial detail not less. I have asked many questions at this table and outside this table to attempt to meet my responsibilities.

I was surprised when my multiple requests for more complete information on specific expenditures were denied. My request for full disclosure of the line item details of this budget was also refused. This lack of transparency in our budget is troubling. I take my responsibility as a Board member seriously, and without full disclosure of the financial details in a budget this size, the board cannot be expected do its due diligence.

I find it interesting as well when I reached across the parking lot for information after our last meeting the budget changed significantly Monday morning. This is the official response to my questions.

February 2, 2008

John,

In response to your two questions I provide the following information.

Have Health insurance rates been finalized?

Within the last two weeks we received notice that our maximum rate increase for July 1 will be 1.21 %. We are working through our agent to get that reduced further. To the credit of our employees utilization is down. I caution you that to develop actual budgetary impacts of this rate change an employee by employee analysis is required due to change in number participating in each type of plan, and premium sharing, and of course how accurate the current budget estimate is.

What are the Town's expenses to videotape Council meetings? What are the requirements for tape storage?

We have a volunteer run the camera and taping. We cover his fuel expenses with a very modest gift of \$50.00 or so a year at holiday time. We also use about 24 tapes a year at \$2.00 each. So our costs are about \$100 a year. You are aware that we primarily broadcast live. The system was set up that the School Admin Building could also broadcast live on Channel 13. A standard Cat 5 computer wire would need to be pulled though the conduit between the buildings and two adaptors (\$50 each) plugged into each end.

Videotapes are treated the same as audio tapes under the State Records retention schedule. The tapes need to be kept 6 months after the acceptance of the minutes. They can be re-used or destroyed at that time.

John A. Elsesser, Town Manager
JElsesser@coventryct.org
860-742-6324

I believe our Financial Director had knowledge of the new Health Insurance rates prior to our first meeting on this budget and did not disclose this information until pushed. We also experienced a huge reduction in the videotaping proposal of Board Meetings after my inquiry. I must conclude the original requested amount had no basis in fact and was not a serious representation of actual cost. This is an example of why we as a board should have full line item disclosure of all financial facts in our budget.

At the last meeting I was assured the bus "17H" information would be forwarded to me. I have seen nothing to date. The transportation committee of this Board has never met or considered the merits of this budget. Yet I have now seen a reduction in the original request for bus expenditure from the superintendent's budget.

I have asked many questions this week and have been stalled on many. I have asked 3 times to see the GRANTS budget, which is not disclosed in our budget. We are responsible for the contractual obligations for the employees hired under these grants. And I am sure their benefits are paid for by the budget in front of us. It is reasonable to expect all budgetary items we are held responsible for to be presented to us in the budget.

After carefully and thoughtfully reviewing the proposed budget I recommend the following changes

Add in:

Tech Ed supplies – CNH @ \$2,000
Musical Instrument – CNH @ \$1,450
Extra Curricular Support Grades 3-8 @ \$1,250
Additional 5 Vo-Ag Students @ \$39,960
Add to Vacancy Savings @ \$100,000
Ad in HSA Health Insurance savings \$120,000
Eliminate the proposed new bus @ \$25,000
Eliminate the proposed new Curriculum specialist @ \$68,716
Reduce Travel Board of Education by \$300
Reduce Travel Central Office by \$1,500
Eliminate CAFE dues @ \$11,779

I move to approval a budget of \$23,080,354 with my recommended changes.

SECOND

(Having made the motion I have the right by Robert Rules to speak first)

This motion is in line with our discussion at our board meeting last week and I have added new areas of savings based on new information. I eliminated the Curriculum Specialist, which is consistent with our discussion at the last meeting. I was happy to see the reading teacher and the challenge and enrichment teacher in there. This has a direct, positive impact on the children. I have included adding 5 additional students to the Vo-Ag program. It is not enough to meet the

demand, but it would be a start. My concern is paying for these positions and the on-going expense of the Vo-Ag Students. We cannot use a one-time savings in Health Insurance to fund an on-going expense like employees or tuition.

As we discussed at the table last week retirements should provide for up to \$125,000 in savings on new hires. This should more than cover these expenses going forward. Do not fear the money will not be there. It will most likely be more. It also gives the administration the incentive to reach this goal.

As far as adding in savings in the HSA insurance, the money is demonstrated to be in a budgeted 5.52% increase in the first budget presented. In Sherry Holmes presentation to the board the 10% anticipated health insurance increase was offset by the anticipated migration of employees into HSA. The established baseline of \$318,622 savings in the updated budget minus the original increase of \$197,099 is a savings of \$121,566 not reflected in the new budget.

I also believe the Board of Education should make sacrifices just as they ask of others, thus my recommendation to eliminate the dues to affiliate with CAFE, as we have done in past years. All the reasons stated to maintain our affiliation for a resource center are valid but repetitious. We have the largest law firm in Connecticut for Boards of Ed on retainer. Any information we need is at their fingertips. We also have the State Board of Education to help fill in any gaps. With the elimination of CAFE dues our need to travel will be reduced, and in conjunction with our travel budget being reduced the Administrators can forego some travel as well.

This proposed budget is truly for the children to enhance their educational opportunities and better serve their needs. This proposed budget would deliver better value for both our students and our taxpayers.

The education budget is not created in a vacuum. We have to take into consideration the whole budget. Our budget may be the largest part of the community budget but is only a part of the whole. We have to remember that the Town will be looking for an increase as well. The fact is our grand list grew only enough to cover a small portion of any increase in spending. Even with the budget I have proposed we are asking for a tax increase close to 1 mil..., which I respectfully regret.

The budget I have propose is responsible, by making these adjustments we will deliver better opportunities to the students and a better value to the taxpayers. It is a fair and fiscally responsible budget that we as leaders should unanimously adopt.

I submit this to be included in the minutes.