



# SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES

January 8, 2015

Seymour Middle School – Library Media Center

7:15 p.m.

## BOARD MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Yashu Putorti, Chairman  
Saundra Gesek  
Kristen Harmeling  
Jay Hatfield (arrived 7:16 pm)  
Jennifer Magri  
Allison Sobieski-McAndrew  
Fred Stanek  
Ed Strumello (arrived 7:16 pm)

## OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Christine Syriac, Superintendent of Schools  
Nancy Snopkowski, Associate Superintendent  
Rick Belden, Asst. Superintendent, Finance & Operations  
Lee-Ann Dauerty, Board Clerk  
Ginny Tagliatela, Director of Special Services  
Jim Freund, Principal, SHS  
Tara Yusko, Assistant Principal, SHS  
Paul Lucke, Assistant Principal, SHS  
Bernadette Hamad, Principal, SMS  
Ernie DiStasi, Assistant Principal, SMS  
Mary Sue Feige, Principal, BS  
Kristopher Boyle, Assistant Principal, BS  
David Olechna, Principal, CLS  
Roxanne Melaragno, Assistant Principal, CLS  
Kurt Miller, First Selectman  
Cindy Dion

## I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Putorti called the meeting to order with the Pledge of Allegiance at 7:15 pm.

Mr. Putorti introduced Mrs. Syriac who will present the 2015-16 Budget.

## II. INFORMATION

### A. 2015-16 Board of Education Budget Workshop – Christine Syriac

Mrs. Syriac said this budget totals \$32,747,165 which is an increase of \$1,016,924 or a 3.2% increase over the current budget. Mrs. Syriac said it should be noted that this request is similar to her previous budget requests in that there are many items that would benefit our educational system and students but not all of those items are included in this budget request. She said she plans to transition those items into future budgets either through reallocation of existing funds or through the request of additional funds in future budget years. Administrators were asked to present their budget requests with a focus on minimal increases, possible reallocation of funds and a vision of what they would like to see in the future. The exception was the department of special services where increased service hours and an increasing number of identified students have resulted in a strain on our existing staffing levels.

Mrs. Syriac's strategy has been to present a fiscally conservative and responsible budget while continuing to be cognizant of the tax burden increases place on local taxpayers. The goal continues to be increased student achievement. Mrs. Syriac's budget request focuses on:

- ensuring that we maintain our operational responsibilities to foster a positive and safe learning and working environment
- increasing staffing levels in the special services department to effectively meet the needs of our students
- finding methods to reallocate existing funds so as to provide necessary resources that we have not been able to support through new budget monies in the past
- Providing additional opportunities for student involvement in after school programs.

The First Selectman requested that the BOE present a budget near 2% which Mrs. Syriac said she was unable to do. Mrs. Syriac reviewed the operational responsibilities. It includes an increase in staff for special services, possible reallocation, and providing for student involvement in after school activities. While they tried very hard, she is unable to present a 2.0% increase for the budget. She cannot support standing still or going backward. She spoke of the positive gains we have realized across the district. Our kindergarten students are ready for guided reading earlier in the year due to all day Kindergarten. She reminded the Board that over the past four years we have added a world language program at the middle school, an additional art teacher at the high school, increased the music program at the high school, increased the theater arts activities, the STEM program at the middle school and early intervention at the elementary level. Mrs. Syriac distributed a document that illustrates how the Board of Education is not a drag on the community. She wanted to show that we contribute to the community by purchasing from local vendors, by supporting and contributing to local charities such as the Middle School turkey drive, and supporting our community such as enabling 65 middle school families to receive gifts for the holidays. Our students participate in parades and visit Shady Knoll residents. She said she has asked Mr. DiStasi to work on a project to partner with local businesses. We focus on energy savings and building maintenance. She said we must work together. Mrs. Syriac distributed the level services budget. At the elementary level Mrs. Syriac told the Board that she is postponing her request to implement in the 15-16 school year a World Language Program in grades K-5 and will make that request next year. In 16-17 she will be recommend the phasing out of the computer class we offer as a special in grades K-5 since technology education needs to be in the classroom. In addition, she spoke of adding a second technology integration position in 16-17, adding an additional physical education teacher to each elementary school so PE can be increased to 2-3 times a week. She feels our students need more opportunities for physical activity. She talked about adding a SRBI math teacher that will be funded by reallocation of an extra fifth grade position at Bungay Elementary School. At the middle school level, administration will continue to look for ways to strengthen the academic program at SMS, ways to increase student involvement in after school programs, and will look for additional electives. The high school will be looking to continue to expand the offering of creative courses and in the 16-17 budget will offer courses such as biomechanics, civil/environmental engineering, and robotics. She recommended the elimination of Family and Consumer Science position at SHS as of the 15-16 school year and that the high school will be in a position to offer a Culinary Program beginning in the 17-18 school year. The high school will continue its current work in the expansion of the fine arts, the performing arts, technology and business that link classroom instruction with after school activities. There will be a discussion in the spring regarding the addition of a Capstone Project as a graduation requirement. Mrs. Syriac also talked about the plan to eliminate the part-time administrator position of athletic director and merge that position with the assistant principal position that was filled this current school year as previously discussed. Mrs. Syriac shared with the BOE that if the budget request is not successful at this level, the only way to reduce the budget by hundreds of thousands of dollars will be to reduce staffing which will be devastating to the district's progress. Mrs. Harmeling asked what the best guess for Special Education students in the next year. The best guess is the 291 students plus 10. Mrs. Harmeling said she felt 6 out placed students were missing from the document provided and Mr. Belden explained those students are attending magnet schools and receiving services at those schools. We get billed for those services. Mrs. Syriac said the handout will be updated and sent to the Board.

Mrs. Harmeling asked that the per pupil cost inclusive of all schools also be included. She said she was surprised at the trending number and asked if other districts were experiencing the same. Mrs. Syriac said it is consistent with the state average and she felt other districts were experiencing the same. Mr. Strumello said he felt outside agencies should be considerate of costs. Mrs. Harmeling asked if SRBI impacted the identification process. Mrs. Tagliatela said SRBI changed the guidelines. It used to be IQ and lack of academic achievement, now it is how they are responding to SRBI intervention. She said we saw a bump in 2009-10 but now we seem to be leveling out. We catch the students earlier rather than waiting for an academic achievement deficit. Mrs. Magri reminded the Board that you cannot cut from the Special Education department. Mrs. Harmeling said we need to be able to explain this to the public without discounting the needs of the students. It is important to remember that the child needs services not labels. Mrs. Harmeling asked about 504 students and where they fall within the budget. Mrs. Syriac explained that 504 and IEP students are different and 504 students are not special education. Mr. Stanek asked about the elimination of the Athletic Director position and the reorganization of responsibilities of the Administrators at the high school. Mrs. Syriac explained what might be reorganized and how the day of the administrator who is also doing Athletic Director duties may be more flexible. She spoke of creating a balance between the three administrators. Mr. Hatfield said he was not in favor of this and spoke of when Mr. Necio did this. Mrs. Syriac reminded the Board that the total enrollment is much less than when Mr. Necio did this. She said this was a solution to reducing administration costs at the high school without the loss of an assistant principal. Mr. Strumello said he felt this would provide a better way to evaluate coaches by being able to see the interaction between coaches and students throughout the day. Mr. Hatfield asked about the possible cost savings for the open position (Williams). Mrs. Syriac said we cannot know the savings until we hire for the position. He also asked about Department Heads and academic leaders. Mr. Stanek asked if all three administrators would be covering the Athletic Director responsibilities and Mrs. Syriac responded that one administrator would be designated as the Athletic Director. He asked what would happen if a discipline need occurred and the Administrator was doing Athletic Director duties. Mrs. Syriac shared how this worked when she was at Woodland. Mr. Stanek stated that he had reservations about this and was concerned about disrupting things at the high school. Mr. Stanek told Mrs. Syriac he appreciated the efforts to reduce the budget and he did not feel the need to lose an administrator. Mrs. Harmeling asked about the elimination of a math teacher; Mrs. Syriac said class size enrollments indicate a reduction. This could have been done last year but it would have meant a staff reduction; this year with the teacher retiring no reduction is necessary. Mrs. Harmeling also asked if students will miss the Family and Consumer and a variety of Science classes. Mrs. Syriac said she felt they would miss it but would have other opportunities course selections. Ms. Gesek asked if the library media specialist would be eliminated at the high school. Mrs. Syriac said as of right now the teacher hasn't indicated that she is retiring. There is a possibility that this position can be split with the middle school for the 2015-16 school year. Mr. Putorti called for a one minute recess. When the recess was over, Mrs. Harmeling asked if we were going to change the model away from department heads to content coordinators. Mrs. Syriac said the current model is working.

### III. **POSSIBLE ACTION**

#### A. 2015-16 Board of Education Budget

**MOTION:**(Ms. Harmeling/sec., Mr. Strumello) to adopt the Superintendent's Education Budget for the 2015-16 School year move it forward to the Town of Seymour

Mr. Belden requested the amount be included in the motion.

**MOTION:** (Ms. Harmeling/sec., Mr. Strumello) to amend the motion

**SO VOTED**

**AFFIRMATIVE:** Ms. Gesek, Ms. Harmeling, Mr. Hatfield, Ms. Magri, Mr. Putorti, Ms. Sobieski-McAndrew, Mr. Stanek, Mr. Strumello

**MOTION:** (Ms. Harmeling/sec., Mr. Strumello) to adopt the Superintendent's Education Budget and make it the Board of Education Budget for the 2015-16 School year in the amount of \$32,747,165 and move it forward to the Town of Seymour

**SO VOTED**

**AFFIRMATIVE:** Ms. Gesek, Ms. Harmeling, Mr. Hatfield, Ms. Magri, Mr. Putorti, Ms. Sobieski-McAndrew, Mr. Stanek, Mr. Strumello

**IV. ADJOURNMENT**

(Mr. Strumello/sec., Mr. Hatfield) to adjourn the meeting

Meeting adjourned at 8:45 pm

Submitted by:  
Lee-Ann Dauerty  
Board Clerk