

Seymour Board of Education



SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES

January 4, 2017

Seymour Middle School – Library Media Center

7:00 p.m.

BOARD MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Yashu Putorti, Chairman
James Garofolo
Kristen Harmeling
Jay Hatfield
Peter Kubik (7:28 pm)
Ed Strumello

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:

Jennifer Magri
Allison Sobieski
Fred Stanek

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Christine Syriac, Superintendent of Schools
Rick Belden, Assistant Superintendent - Finance & Operations
Lee-Ann Dauerty, Board Clerk
Kris Boyle, Director of Special Services
Jim Freund, Principal, SHS
Paul Lucke, Assistant Principal, SHS
Bernadette Hamad, Principal, SMS
Ernie DiStasi, Assistant Principal, SMS
Mary Sue Feige, Principal, BS
Lauren Reid, Assistant Principal, BS
David Olechna, Principal, CLS

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Putorti called the meeting to order with the Pledge of Allegiance at 7:01 p.m.

II. PUBLIC COMMENT

None

III. DISCUSSION

A. 2017-18 Board of Education Budget Workshop

Mr. Putorti asked Mrs. Syriac to begin her presentation on the 2017-18 Education Budget. Excerpts of Mrs. Syriac's presentation are below:

- Budget time, which it seems to me it is always budget time, causes angst between caring smart people who all want what is best for the children of Seymour (or any district)...however I will repeat myself from last year by stating we all have different beliefs about what constitutes success for a student. What I present this evening is in my belief in the best interest of increased student achievement and meets our students ever increasing social emotional needs and prepares them for the world ahead...we should not be distracted by advocating for what was the norm when we attended school and the oft used phrase "didn't we turn out fine?".
- Let's reflect on some of the important work we have been doing for the past five years in the district that has been supported by thoughtful educational planning and through the reallocation of existing resources. These supports that we have in place for our students are not there because of new spending as the BOE has not been funded at a level to support contractual increases in over 11 years.

- They are in place because of planning, because of reallocation of resources, because of prioritization. In developing an educational plan, planning the budget, I know it is my charge to use tax dollars wisely. In the past, in education, tough budget years typically lasted for a few years; our current challenge is that spending levels haven't returned to normal. We have faced sustained multi-year low level funding with no relief in sight. Some refer to this as the "new normal" and I worry about sustainability over time. Seymour, not unlike other towns and the State as a whole will need to find ways to increase other revenue sources if it is committed to not raising local property taxes...as the cost of educating our children will continue to rise even through careful spending and reallocation of dollars.
- Despite shrinking resources more demands are being placed on school districts – rising standards, response to greater student needs, and preparing our students for a new workplace. And while my charge in planning the budget is to use tax dollars wisely my first priority is to develop a program that provides our students with the opportunity to achieve at higher levels than they are currently achieving at...I have said many times that it is part of my theory of action that our students are able to learn more than they are currently learning and it is our role to provide that opportunity. It's all about student learning...period. I will not present to the BOE a budget that doesn't sustain student learning at high levels. I will not recommend adding resources that have not been adequately planned for simply because NEASC has stated them in their report...what good is a cart if we do not have the horse to pull it? The NEASC report stated that they hope the BOE will employ a full time library media specialist by the time of the Special Progress Report in October of 2017. You will not see my requesting to add a library media specialist position in the 2017-2018 budget. I have met with and have spoken to the high school administration and the Associate Superintendent that until a curriculum and program are developed for the position it would not be my recommendation to change from the current .6 position to fulltime. When such a program/curriculum is approved by the BOE then a discussion can occur about the need for the position to be full-time.
- Another NEASC request is more equitable technology resource distribution. Technology at the high school in the way of additional devices for other classrooms will be managed through the technology line-item. It is our plan to provide chrome book carts for three additional departments at SHS for the 2017-2018 school year; currently the Social Studies Department has a cart for each classroom.
- In preparing the overall budget I again looked at our class sizes at all grade levels. It is our expectation that enrollment will remain similar to current levels at the two elementary schools and at the high school for the 17-18 school year. The middle school will have around 40 less students.
- SMS has a declining enrollment which will continue to decline over the next five to ten school years. Last year we began making some reductions in staffing at SMS, however beyond my recommendations administration will begin having discussions with the BOE in the coming year about a plan to move away from a middle school team model which is more costly to staff and movement toward a department structure which permits for teachers to teach at multiple grade levels. With an incoming sixth grade class of 147 in 17-18 and a class of 113 in 21-22 (five years) it will no longer make fiscal sense to keep the current team model in place.
- Mrs. Hamad and Mr. DiStasi have some great ideas and will begin that conversation with the new superintendent, the Associate Superintendent and the curriculum committee to move forward to the BOE for consideration in the fall.
- I will be looking to increase our special education department by 1.5 teachers and instructional paraprofessionals. We need to add a second ABA (Applied Behavioral Analysis) room at Chatfield LoPresti Elementary School due to the size of the program as well as the age of the students.
- The other .5 additional special services teacher is to make the current .5 special education teacher position at SHS into a full time position. The teacher would work at both the middle and high school to supplement the additional service hours support needed at SMS in 2017-2018.
To support a program being developed at Seymour High School for our most at risk students I am looking to increase the current .6 social work position to full time.

- **Reductions:**
At this time in my discussions with Dr. Boyle we feel that moving from 4.5 speech and language teachers to 4 full time speech and language teachers will meet the service hour needs of our students. Therefore I am recommending eliminating .5 Speech and Language. This reduction can be made without any current staff members losing their position.
- I am presenting to the BOE a budget that is below the level services budget and the level services budget is at 2.4%. The Superintendent's recommended budget that I am presenting to you this evening is a 1.56% increase of \$507,923. This is \$276,135 below level services or .85% lower yet permits for increased resources where needed.

Mr. Putorti asked for questions from the Board.

Ms. Harmeling said this was a good start and asked if the Town was using a 5% placeholder for health insurance. Mrs. Syriac said she was not sure what number is used. Mr. Strumello asked about the reduction of FTE. Mrs. Syriac said that no one would be non renewed because of this proposal. Mr. Strumello said he felt the public feels diminished enrollment should equal diminished staff. He feels their question will be where are you cutting? Ms. Harmeling said it was a budgetary reduction; not an actual cut. Mrs. Syriac said we are not eliminating but reallocating and redistributing. She reminded the Board that removing staff will result in larger class sizes. Mr. Hatfield asked what the First Selectman is looking for in this budget. Mrs. Syriac said he would like to see \$400,000. Mr. Strumello asked about Special Education and if there were increases in disability categories. Dr. Boyle explained that there is a national upward trend in identifying learning disabilities. Seymour may be trending slightly higher than the national average. He reminded the Board that because we are a small district, identifying just one or two students makes our percentage go up.

IV. POSSIBLE ACTION

A. 2017-18 Board of Education Budget

MOTION: (Mr. Hatfield/sec., Mr. Strumello to adopt the superintendent's budget for the 2017-18 school year in the amount of \$33,107,338 (1.5% increase) and move it forward to the Town of Seymour

Ms. Harmeling said she would be more comfortable waiting to adopt the budget at the 1/9/17 Board of Education meeting. She felt this would give the Board some time to review and digest the numbers and because the 1/9/17 meeting is only a few days away it would not be a burden to hold off until then. Mr. Strumello agreed saying it would give us all time to reflect and rescinded his second on this motion.

V. PUBLIC COMMENT

None

VI. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: (Mr. Strumello/sec., Mr. Garofolo) to adjourn

SO VOTED

AFFIRMATIVE: Mr. Garofolo, Ms. Harmeling, Mr. Hatfield, Mr. Kubik, Mr. Putorti, Mr. Strumello

The meeting adjourned at 8:35 pm.

Submitted by:
Lee-Ann Dauerty
Board Clerk