

Special Meeting Minutes
Fairfield BoE, January 23, 2024, 7:00 PM

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[Call to order of the Regular Meeting of the Board of Education and Roll Call](#)

Chairman Jennifer Jacobsen called the Regular Meeting to order at 7:00PM. Present were members Nick Aysseh, Katie Flynn, Carol Guernsey, Jennifer Jacobsen, David Krasnoff, Jennifer Maxon Kennelly (arrived at 7:03pm), Jason Li, Jeff Peterson, and Tracey Rinaldi. Others present were Superintendent Mike Testani, members of the central office leadership team, and approximately 8 members of the public.

Review of Outstanding Questions from 1-16-2024

Ms. Guernsey referenced Question 3 and said she was against the proposal to join the music and visual arts coordinators into one administrative position; she felt it would be a reduction to student support and would have appreciated more advance notice about the proposal earlier in the budget process. Mr. Testani said the change in leadership roles would result in an increase of \$25K and reiterated that coordinators also have teaching responsibilities; the new positions are administrative and not tied to the teacher contract and hours.

Mr. Peterson said he was in favor of keeping the coordinator positions; they each have specific expertise.

Mr. Testani said he would be happy to create 2 separate positions for music and visual arts, or maintain the current coordinator structure. The proposal was intended to enhance the departments and have guided leadership; he understands the Board's concerns and will go in either direction.

Mrs. Maxon Kennelly referenced Question 7 regarding high school WL teachers visiting middle schools to speak about the language offerings. Dr. Zavodjancik said the visits are no longer scheduled due to time constraints.

Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly referenced Question 12 regarding the number of additional ECC classrooms. Mr. Mancusi said 2 additional ECC classrooms are planned at a 3rd site, potentially Holland Hill, and one additional ECC classroom is planned at Stratfield; plans are based on a total of 13 ECC classrooms. Mr. Papageorge said both sites meet all requirements to support ECC without any known facility increases.

Mrs. Jacobsen referenced page 2 regarding the ECC programming expansion and asked if \$188K and 3.2 FTE are the total amounts, including benefits. Ms. LeBorious reported that \$299K includes the cost of insurance, supplies and equipment. The number does not include transportation because it will likely be sustainable without the need for additional buses.

Ms. Flynn asked whether 1.2 FTE for specials would be sufficient. Mr. Mancusi said specials vary and include related services; the 1.2 FTE should cover the need.

Mr. Li referenced page 16 regarding the bilingual requirement and a possible influx of different languages. Ms. Goss said the current need at McKinley is only for Spanish.

Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly referenced Question 102 regarding special education projections. Ms. LeBorious said the projections have not changed that much.

Approved 2/13/2024

Ms. Flynn referenced Question 105 and requested more detail on school expenditures. Ms. LeBoriosis said she will provide additional detail.

Mrs. Maxon Kennelly referenced Question 142 regarding mileage reimbursement offered to select staff. Ms. LeBoriosis said mileage reimbursement is offered to instructional and special education staff that travel between schools.

Ms. LeBoriosis confirmed that drums are in the budget for both high schools.

Mrs. Jacobsen referenced Question 160 regarding security upgrades and the FEMA grant. Mr. Papageorge said the total project cost at this time is reflected properly.

Review Section: Contracted Services

Several Board members asked questions related to the Boys Ice Hockey team and increased costs of using SHU and other facility rentals. Ms. Guernsey referenced Question 110, page 60; Mrs. Maxon Kennelly referenced Question 120, page 64.

- Mr. Testani said FPS still uses Wonderland of Ice and facility rental rates have increased. FPS was given prime time slots at SHU; varsity games are played at SHU.
- Ms. Guernsey asked whether 6 JV boys hockey players are enough to field a team, given the cost for ice time and two coaches. Mr. Testani said JV hockey practices alongside varsity.
- Facility rentals cover multiple sports including skiing, bowling and gymnastics. Mrs. Maxon Kennelly requested an evaluation of this expense.

Mrs. Maxon Kennelly referenced Question 122 and asked why the budget for recruitment was not reduced, given that billboards did not garner any results. Ms. Ingram said other recruitment strategies with associated costs, such as career fairs, radio advertisements, and a partnership with IONA College are being used.

Mrs. Jacobsen referenced Question 124 regarding the RFP for legal services. Ms. LeBoriosis said an award is in process and FPS is attempting to hire in-house.

Review Section: Revenue

Ms. Guernsey and Mrs. Maxon Kennelly referenced Question 188, page 145 regarding Medicaid reimbursement. Mr. Mancusi said parental consent fluctuates; it hovers at 50% and has been as high as 60%. Some of the nursing services are also billable. Ms. LeBoriosis said the person who handles Medicaid reimbursement also processes grants for the district; there is confidence that revenue will increase in this area.

Ms. Flynn referenced Question 200 regarding PK tuition rates. Mr. Mancusi said he will provide more information on next year's tuition rate. The typical breakdown is 1/3 full, 1/3 reduced and 1/3 free. Dr. Parrish said the payment amount is determined by parent tax returns. Mr. Aysseh said he would be hesitant to increase the PK tuition revenue line.

Mr. Peterson referenced page 150 and said the building rental fee seems like a large number. Mr. Papageorge said rentals are rebounding and a detailed, very large report is in process. Ms. Guernsey expressed her concern with the increased revenue estimate and has heard that some of the building rental fees are not sustainable for non-profit organizations.

Approved 2/13/2024

Mrs. Maxon Kennelly referenced Question 192 and said she recollected that all special education costs for Open Choice students would be billed to the sending district. Mr. Mancusi said FPS receives \$3K for each Open Choice student; special education costs over \$3K are billed. Mr. Aysseh said he also remembers that the agreement was that any special education cost over \$3K would be billed.

Mrs. Maxon Kennelly referenced Question 205 and asked about the interest in offering tuition for non-resident faculty's children below 6th grade. Mr. Testani said 8 staff members are currently taking advantage of the tuition for their children, and more families would participate if offered to lower grades.

Review Section: Salaries

Ms. Flynn referenced Question 73 and expressed her concern that existing paras would be reallocated to cover the 3 new ECC classrooms. Mr. Mancusi said student needs are monitored very carefully; paras are reallocated every year depending on need.

Mr. Krasnoff referenced Questions 84 and 85 regarding inconsistencies with Gifted FTE and budget allocation. Ms. LeBoriosis said she will provide a supplemental packet on Thursday.

Mrs. Maxon Kennelly referenced Question 32 and asked for a better understanding of the increased library media FTE at FLHS. Dr. Zavodjancik said the library media secretary covers both schools but is located at FLHS.

Mrs. Maxon Kennelly referenced Question 45 and said the Restorative Practices Specialist position appears redundant with the security position. Mr. Testani said the positions are very different; the Restorative Practices Specialist has 30 years of experience, gives students a sense of security and has made a real impact on campus.

Mrs. Maxon Kennelly referenced Question 60 and asked about the hiring process. Mr. Testani said high school sections are determined after all course requests are finalized.

Mrs. Maxon Kennelly referenced Question 62, parent DBT training. Mr. Mancusi said it has been part of the Impact program since 2018-2019. Parent participation increases annually; the program is aimed at parents to support kids at home.

Mr. Krasnoff referenced Question 83 and asked for an explanation of the nearly \$10M staff replacement increase and 40 FTE increase. Ms. LeBoriosis referenced pages 7-8 and said the main budget driver is the new teacher contract. Additional increases include carry-over of non-certified bargaining and non-bargaining groups. The actual increase from this year is 15 new staff. An error on the attrition sheet for FY24 will be corrected.

Ms. Flynn referenced Question 75 and expressed her concern over the lack of crossing guards at North Stratfield. Mr. Papageorge said he was unaware of a crossing guard request for North Stratfield; he works closely with the Police Department to review all requests.

Mrs. Maxon Kennelly referenced Question 65. Mr. Mancusi said the Program Director of Student Support and Mental Health position supports all SEL initiatives, leads school psychologists and social workers, works closely with school counselors at all levels, covers PPTs, and has performed evaluations. Mr. Testani said the additional elementary program coordinator will assist in servicing over 700 students, 8 CLC classrooms and a TLC; an overwhelming task for one person. Mr. Mancusi said the Fairfield sped prevalence rate is now at 18%, higher than the state's 16% prevalence rate.

Approved 2/13/2024

Mrs. Maxon Kennelly referenced Question 68 regarding central office administration and increased salaries. Mr. Testani said this year's budget book did not have the correct job titles and that will be corrected. The 17% salary increase is due to a change in staff; the job of Executive Director for PK-12 was expanded and Ms. Goss was hired at a higher rate than the previous position. Mrs. Maxon Kennelly requested more information on what she calculated as a 6.1% increase for current staff members.

Mrs. Maxon Kennelly referenced Question 71 regarding the duties of regular education paras, and why some schools have more than others. Mr. Mancusi said he will get more specific information. Dr. Zavodjancik said every Kindergarten class has a .6 para.

Mrs. Maxon Kennelly asked about the success of the teacher residency program. Ms. Ingram said the district will use a more cost-effective teacher residency program through SHU next year. Currently, the district employs 2 teachers from the teacher residency program.

Mrs. Maxon Kennelly referenced Question 77 and requested more information on summer school numbers. Ms. Goss said she will provide more detail.

Mrs. Maxon Kennelly asked about staff absences. Mr. Testani said long-term absences are due to illness and maternity leaves.

Mr. Krasnoff asked if the district is required to provide summer ESY. Mr. Mancusi said ESY is mandated; the IDEA grant helps to offset the cost.

Mrs. Maxon Kennelly said she remembers a previous middle school team model for the 6th grade with teams of 3. Mr. Testani said his concern with teams of 3 is the impact on common planning time. Dr. Parrish added that part of the issue is for those teachers with 2 subjects, such as math/science and ELA/social studies. It is a disservice to make those teachers choose which meeting to attend, particularly with new ELA curricula.

Ms. Flynn referenced Question 81 and asked about the variance in lunch aides. Dr. Zavodjancik said aides are a school-based allocation and principals vary in their use of personnel.

Mr. Krasnoff referenced page 39 regarding the maintenance supervisor. Mr. Testani said the position has not yet been filled.

Mrs. Jacobsen referenced Questions 34 and 37 and asked if the \$135K salary is negotiated. Ms. Ingram said the position is budgeted for \$135K and the maximum after negotiating would be \$150K.

Mrs. Maxon Kennelly referenced Question 39. Mr. Testani said the \$168K is for a 12-month position.

Mrs. Jacobsen referenced Question 40. Dr. Parrish said the amount listed is due to an expected transition period for the Director of Technology position, which may cross into the new fiscal year.

Mrs. Jacobsen referenced Question 47 and asked if the reduction will be adjusted in the budget. Ms. LeBorious said she will provide a document with a list of requested adjustments.

Mrs. Jacobsen referenced Question 87 regarding the FTE changes in Transportation. Ms. LeBorious said the Transportation Department includes a supervisor, a secretary, and one part-time finance support staff.

Approved 2/13/2024

Review Section: Benefits

Ms. LeBoriosis said salary amounts do not include the cost of benefits unless the total cost is requested. Mr. Testani said he is anticipating favorable health benefit numbers in the spring.

Review Section: Transportation

Ms. Rinaldi referenced Question 127 and asked for an explanation of why additional transportation is not needed for additional ECC students. Mr. Papageorge said tiered bus routes will accommodate the increase without the need for additional bus runs.

Mr. Mancusi said there is no obligation to provide transportation to full-day, regular education ECC students.

Mr. Krasnoff referenced Question 131, page 65, and asked whether the numbers were over-estimated. Mr. Papageorge said FPS is currently in year 4 of a 5-year contract. A ridership chart will be provided.

Mrs. Maxon Kennelly asked whether flexible elementary start times would help to alleviate some of the transportation pressures. Mr. Papageorge said that the idea has not been reviewed.

Review Section: Operations and Maintenance of Buildings

Mrs. Maxon Kennelly referenced Question 154 and questioned why the Stratfield PK playground is listed twice. Mr. Papageorge said there is one PK playground.

Mrs. Maxon Kennelly referenced Question 155 regarding the Warde turf field. Mr. Testani said he will provide a link to the informal cost sheet.

Mr. Krasnoff asked about the large increase in electricity costs at TMS. Mr. Papageorge said he is in the final stages of onboarding an energy management company to help control costs.

Ms. Flynn referenced Question 154 and asked why the Stratfield PK playground hasn't moved forward. Mr. Papageorge said the playground will require a retaining wall and will cost approximately \$274K. Projects are typically capped at \$500; meetings are held with the superintendent to determine which projects move forward.

Ms. Flynn Referenced Question 162 regarding awareness of the composting program. Mr. Papageorge said monthly meetings are held with the Green Team and efforts are underway to get more schools to participate.

Review Section: Dues and Fees

Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly referenced Question 172 regarding the Superintendent's Network annual dues. Dr. Zavodjancik reported that the dues were captured in this year's instruction line.

Review Section: Support Information

Mr. Peterson referenced Question 235 regarding the solar evaluation. Mr. Papageorge said the new town administration is pro-solar and the district is looking to move forward.

Approved 2/13/2024

Mrs. Maxon Kennelly asked for clarification on the response to Question 210. Dr. Zavodjancik said courses run based on enrollment. The one exception may be for a new course that may not be well-known.

Mrs. Maxon Kennelly referenced Question 216 and asked whether the investment in Dismissal Manager could result in a corresponding reduction in staff. Dr. Parrish said the function of the program does not replace everything the clerical does. Mrs. Flynn said the PTA advocated heavily for Dismissal Manager.

Mrs. Maxon Kennelly referenced Question 218 regarding FCC removing Covid-era funding for hotspots. Ms. Byrnes said the hotspot program was not that successful; carriers provided WiFi at reduced rates during Covid. The state may offer some form of student support if the need arises. Mr. Papageorge reported that the district is working with FirstNet to improve cellular coverage in schools.

Mrs. Maxon Kennelly referenced Question 228, pages 185-186, and expressed surprise at the lack of off-sets for the large curricula expenses in multiple areas. Dr. Zavodjancik reported that the curricula work and related expenses are due to ongoing implementation plans and review cycles; social studies texts have 6-year licensing agreements which are being renewed until the next review.

Mrs. Maxon Kennelly referenced Question 229 and said she didn't understand the additional stipend for athletic directors. Mr. Testani said the responsibilities are more in line with 12-month employees rather than 10 ½ month. Instead of re-opening the contract, a stipend was offered to compensate both athletic directors for summer hours. Mrs. Maxon Kennelly said she could only account for one of the athletic directors' salaries in the budget book and asked for follow-up information on other athletic director's salary.

Mrs. Maxon Kennelly referenced Question 231 and asked about the type of evaluation planned for 'Move This World' SEL Program. Mr. Testani said Dr. Hatzis leads the SEL districtwide team and they have an understanding of where the program is and isn't effective.

Mr. Krasnoff moved, Ms. Flynn seconded to extend the meeting to midnight.

Motion Passed: 5-4

Favor: Ms. Flynn, Ms. Guernsey, Mrs. Jacobsen, Mr. Krasnoff, Mrs. Maxon Kennelly

Oppose: Mr. Aysseh, Mr. Li, Mr. Peterson, Ms. Rinaldi

Mr. Krasnoff commented that as a realtor, he does not expect a decline in enrollment over the next 4 years.

Ms. LeBorious said she will forward a list of budget adjustments requested by the Superintendent in the following areas: summer school, Turnitin software, paraprofessionals, McKinley clerical, and liaison positions.

BoE Suggestions for Budget Amendments

Ms. LeBorious said she will provide a template for Board members to submit detailed amendments.

Mr. Aysseh said he is interested in completing the ECC playground at Stratfield.

Ms. Flynn said she interested in the ECC playground at Stratfield and maintaining the middle school teams for the long-term.

Mr. Li said he is interested in separating the art and music coordinator position.

Approved 2/13/2024

Mr. Krasnoff said he is interested in separating all the coordinator positions and maintaining the current structure. Ms. Guernsey said she is interested in maintaining the structure that is in place now; she could support a music director position. Mr. Testani said it would be a good idea to give the music director supervisory duties. Mrs. Maxon Kennelly said she needs a leadership analysis before moving away from the current structure.

Mrs. Maxon Kennelly said she is interested in: making a motion to cut the data coordinator position; looking closely at the middle school teams; expecting an increase in the PK tuition revenue; and cutting a security position at WFC. She said she cannot bring a budget to other town bodies that has a 40 FTE increase and reduced enrollment.

Ms. LeBorious referenced page 180 and clarified that a portion of the FTE increase is cost-neutral; there was an increase in the number of elementary sections; and an increase in student need. There are many offsets and efficiencies.

Mr. Krasnoff said he is interested in trimming transportation by a few hundred thousand. Mr. Aysseh said the district has a legally binding contract. Ms. LeBorious said fuel is paid directly via reimbursement; the reduction in fuel price is already accounted for.

Ms. Flynn said she is interested in requesting a crossing guard at North Stratfield.

Public Comment

Adele Josovitz, Roseville Avenue: As a former FPS educator, music and art should remain separate positions.

Mick McGarry, FEA President: Thanked the Board for support of the new teacher contract that makes FPS more competitive with other districts.

Adjournment

Mr. Li moved/Ms. Flynn seconded the recommended motion “that this Special Meeting of the Board of Education adjourn”

Mr. Aysseh, Ms. Flynn, Ms. Guernsey, Mrs. Jacobsen, Mr. Krasnoff, Mrs. Maxon Kennelly, Mr. Li, and Mr. Peterson, and Ms. Rinaldi voted in favor.

Motion Passed: 9-0

Meeting adjourned at 11:28PM.

Respectfully submitted by

Carol Guernsey

Fairfield Board of Education, Secretary