

MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF SCHOOL ESTIMATE
BUDGET WORKSHOP
HELD TUESDAY, MARCH 18, 2008 AT 6:00 P.M.
22 VALLEY ROAD, MONTCLAIR, NEW JERSEY

- A. The meeting was opened at 6:12 p.m. and the following statement was read:
- B. Let the minutes reflect that adequate notice of this meeting has been provided in the following manner:
1. On March 14, 2008 notice of this meeting was faxed to the Montclair Times, the Herald and News and the Star-Ledger. The time, date and location of this meeting were accurately set forth therein.
 2. On this same date a copy of said notice was filed with the Township Clerk and was posted at the public bulletin board in the first floor main hall of the Board of Education building, 22 Valley Road.
 3. Copies have also been mailed to all persons who have requested same at no cost.

C. ROLL CALL OF THE BOARD

	Present	Absent
Ed Remsen	<u> X </u>	_____
Jerold Freier	<u> X </u>	_____
Gerald Tobin	<u> X </u>	_____
Shelly Lombard	<u> X </u>	_____
Timothy Barr	<u> X </u>	_____
Staff Members Present	<u> 3 </u>	
Members of the Public	<u> 9 </u>	
Members of the Press	<u> 1 </u>	

The Pledge of Allegiance occurred at 6:13 p.m.

D. EXPLANATION OF PURPOSE OF MEETING MAYOR REMSEN

Mayor Remsen stated that this was the first meeting of the Board of School Estimate and wanted to introduce Jerold Freier and Gerald Tobin, both who have served in prior years. He also acknowledged Board of Education members Shelly Lombard and Timothy Barr.

E. REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Jerold Freier moved to approve the minutes from the following meetings:

1. Budget Workshop Conference Meeting held March 21, 2007
2. Public Budget Hearing held March 26, 2007
3. Public Meeting held March 27, 2007

Seconded by Gerald Tobin and approved by a vote of 5 - 0.

E. DISCUSSION OF PROPOSED 2008-2009 SCHOOL BUDGET

Dr. Alvarez explained the budget process as follows:

The budget is introduced to the Board
The Board approved a tentative budget with a 7.2% tax levy increase

Dr. Alvarez stated that a sincere attempt was made to maintain the current level of programming as well as to include items which they felt would be essential. He stated that comments were heard from the Mayor, community members and parents requesting that the Board reconsider the high numbers. He also stated that the Board was trying to reduce the budget by not cutting programs but through efficiency and consolidation, by reallocating positions and cuts that will not significantly affect programs.

In order to bring the 7.2% increase down to 5.6%, the following was done:

Eliminated 5-6 new positions, which were in original budget
Cut of 7 full-time staff members
Reduction of 3.5 administrative positions
Reduction of subsidy for food service

Dr. Alvarez advised that we had requested four waivers but only 1 was approved, forcing the Board to move items from the base budget to a separate proposal – therefore the larger proposal.

It was asked whether we were at cap and Dr. Alvarez responded that we were

not at cap. Dr. Alvarez commented that this was the lowest tax increase in recent years and that \$2.5 million was appropriated from surplus, the highest amount ever allocated.

Mayor Remsen questioned whether the slide presentation would show which specific positions were being eliminated.

Dr. Alvarez responded that the presentation would show specific positions but not staff names.

Dana Sullivan offered the following regarding the operating budget.

1. The budget process is started early in the fall and is an on-going project.
2. The board goals remained the same as last years –
 - a. Achievement for all students
 - b. Reduction of over-representation of minority youngsters in special education
 - c. Infusion of technology into the curriculum
3. Most of the priorities of the Board stay the same –
 - a. Math – which is a high priority
 - b. Meeting the New Jersey Core Curriculum Standards
 - c. Reducing the minority achievement gap
 - d. Meeting the needs of special education students
 - e. Cost effective planning
 - f. Safety for students and staff
 - g. Maintaining enrollment class size needs
4. The projected budget is \$109.3 million - \$93.2 from local taxes.
5. This year state aid is not broken into categories but is lumped as basic state aid. In 2007-2008, some aid was shown in special revenue fund and was designated for a specific purpose.
6. \$2.5 million was appropriated from fund balance leaving \$1.8 million in surplus, which is the State's 2% recommended amount.
7. Reserve for encumbrance represents purchase orders at the end of the year that are carried over into the next fiscal year.
8. Other revenue increased due to an increase in unanticipated interest

income.

9. Adult School revenues and expenditures are run through the budget but do not impact on the tax levy since they are a totally self-sustaining program run on tuition collected.
10. There are other grants which the Board receives during the year but they cannot be shown in the budget until official notification is received; therefore the decrease in special revenue.
11. The increase in state aid was 2% or \$187,992.
12. The tax levy increase is 5.6% or an average of \$8,593 in school taxes for the homeowner.
13. The original budget which was approved by the Board of Education and sent to the county had a 7.2% tax levy increase. From that budget, 22.3 staff was reduced. In the original 2008-2009 budget, several staff members were added but the following reductions were made for an overall reduction of \$1,287,750:

- 4 Curriculum specialists at the elementary level
- 1 Student Assistant Counselor at the high school
- 1 ESL teacher at the elementary level
- 0.8 Magnet Coordinator at the elementary level
- 3.5 administrative positions
- 1 secretarial position
- 5 personal aides
- Subsidy payment for food service

Mayor Remsen questioned Mrs. Sullivan if all administrative positions cut were at the school level and Mrs. Sullivan responded that some were at Central Office.

Mrs. Sullivan noted that the special education costs incorporate a very large portion of the budget – approximately 25% or over \$27 million.

Mrs. Sullivan also stated that \$867,000 was requested in waivers but only \$291,928 was approved and that items in the waivers not approved could not be placed in the separate proposal but had to go into the base budget. Some of these items were:

- Energy costs
- Insurance costs
- Capital Outlay

The adjusted tax levy cap was \$91,972,071 or a little over 4%. The budget is

\$1,308,881 over cap (separate proposal). The original budget was \$2,020,981 over cap.

Mrs. Sullivan noted that there are five areas in the separate proposal –

- Student Achievement
- Artist in Residence Program at the elementary level
- School Security (Cops and School Program plus high school security)
- Health and Wellness
- Montclair Parking Authority (parking at Central Office)

She also noted that the following were added to the 2008-2009 budget – most in the base budget but some in the capital budget:

- World Language Instruction (Teacher for Chinese language to be shared Between Nishuane and Glenfield)
- Arts Initiative
- Technology
- Hardware
- Renovation of a woodshop room at Glenfield to a technology classroom
- Special Education Transition Facilitator (.4)
- Middle School Literacy Consultant

Dana Sullivan commented on the Cost Per Pupil and noted that Montclair is compared to similar districts, many in Essex County. She stated that Montclair spends more than the state average and less than the average of similar districts noted in this chart. It was noted that Montclair continues to place more emphasis on instruction in the classroom, classroom support and less on administration and plant.

Mayor Remsen questioned how the comparisons are done. Dana Sullivan responded that is it done by the State Department of Education and is very comparable.

Jerold Freier asked for some explanation regarding what was included in Student Achievement in the separate proposal.

Dr. Alvarez explained that under the \$1 million grant, which we had previously received, there were many worthwhile programs which the Board wanted to preserve such as IMANI, Writer's Room, Project Oasis, Kindergarten Screening etc. and these would be incorporated in this section.

Mayor Remsen questioned the number of staff members with regard to Health and Wellness Program and if they were full-time employees with benefits.

Dr. Alvarez responded that there were 2 full-time employees receiving no benefits and that these two employees generate approximately \$260,000 in grants with the assistance of many volunteers.

Jerold Freier questioned whether the Board has had any discussions with the Mountainside Health Fund.

Dr. Alvarez stated that some discussions were held and he believes we had received \$24,000.

G. DISCUSSION OF PROPOSED 2008-2009 CAPITAL BUDGET

Dana Sullivan presented the capital budget and stated that the capital budget is aligned to the district's goals and objectives.

Mrs. Sullivan stated that the district's priorities are to support the Superintendent's initiatives, support instructional initiative, safety for students and staff, improve building aesthetics, improve quality of service we provide and long term cost effective planning.

Mrs. Sullivan noted that request for approval is for one year in the amount of \$5,141,200. The capital budget included the following projects:

- Roof replacements at various schools
- Window replacements at Northeast School
- Waterproof and masonry work
- HVAC repair work
- Renovation to a woodshop room at Glenfield to a technology classroom
- Water damage to various classrooms
- Renovations to Mt. Hebron and George Inness auditorium
- Furniture and equipment
- Field house equipment
- Technology (hardware and software)
- Painting of Bradford and Montclair High School gyms
- Ceiling renovation to high school gym
- Soffit repair at Central Office
- Playground renovation at Northeast school
- Continuation of replacing security cameras at high school
- Sidewalk at Nishuane School
- Landscaping at Mt. Hebron

Mayor Remsen requested an organizational chart for Central Office and questioned the amount of stipends being paid.

Dana Sullivan referred Mayor Remsen to the budget book where it outlines what stipends are paid to coaches, teachers for high school clubs and activities but noted that

they are not the current rates. Mayor Remsen was provided with the organizational chart.

Mayor Remsen asked for a little clarification regarding the Writer's Room; i.e. do they receive stipends, how many volunteers are there, do the volunteers request specific schools etc.

Dr. Alvarez responded that there are approximately 12 staff members, who do not receive stipends, and over 90 volunteers in the program. He noted that the staff members coordinate the volunteers in all schools and the Board feels it is a worthwhile program. He also noted that he believed some volunteers may request specific schools.

H. RECEIVE COMMENTS AND/OR QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC CONCERNING THE PROPOSED 2008-2009 SCHOOL BUDGET

Cary Africk - expressed his concern over the decrease in the amount allocated for textbooks. His concern was that there were not enough textbooks in certain classes.

Dr. Alvarez responded that the request for textbooks comes through the schools and the reason for the decrease in allotted funds is that within the last five years, a real effort has been made to adopt the latest textbooks.

Mr. Africk asked if the percentage of special education students was known and do we spend comparable dollars to other districts.

Dr. Alvarez responded that the average percentage was 14% state wide. He also noted that special education needs are different in each district and therefore the dollar amounts differ.

Mr. Africk asked Dr. Alvarez if Dr. Pryor's position was being replaced.

Dr. Alvarez noted that the position was being replaced as Director of School and Community Relations, not as Assistant Superintendent and at a lower salary.

Gail Prusslin – 138 Buckingham Road – spoke in support of the music teacher added to the budget. Ms. Prusslin noted how important music is to the students.

Deborah Wilson -140 North Mountain Avenue – asked Dana Sullivan if State increases in aid are continuous or just once.

Dana Sullivan responded that they are usually one time but this year district's received an Adjustment Aid in the amount of \$2.8 million. She stated that the aid is promised for three years but there is no guarantee beyond three years.

Jerald Freier had a comment regarding the new school. He stated that he recalled when the Board first applied for funding for the new school, using the enrollment projection and state formula, that the Board was short space for 900-1000 students but that the new school would only add space for 300-400 students.

Dana Sullivan stated that the new school would house 550 students and if Rand's 370 students move into the school, it would be a difference of 180 students.

Jerald Freier than questioned whether the new school would meet the Board's needs or fall short using the state formula.

Dr. Alvarez responded that the new school would fall short.

Mayor Remsen questioned if Renaissance would expand and Dana Sullivan responded that it may expand beyond its current enrollment of 242.

Mayor Remsen asked what the enrollment was at the two middle schools and Dana Sullivan responded that the enrollment was 668 at Glenfield and 603 at Mt. Hebron. He also questioned whether the Board felt more parents would opt for Renaissance if the school was moved into Rand.

Dr. Alvarez responded that this might be a correct assumption.

Jerald Freier questioned whether space was the problem we are sending children out-of-district or was it a special need services for the child.

Dr. Alvarez responded that if we currently have approximately 110 students out-of-district and if space was available, we could bring 24-40 of those students back into the district.

Jerald Freier asked whether it would be better for the students.

Dr. Alvarez responded that it would be better but only for the right reasons noting that some students might need services not available in the district. He also noted that children are placed out-of-district after careful study by the child study team and not solely upon parent's request.

Jim Price – 47 Gordonhurst Avenue – questioned whether the renovations to the Little Theatre would be done this year.

Dana Sullivan responded that the roof will be done this summer but renovations will not be done to the interior until next year.

Mayor Remsen noted that the Board of School Estimate would meet Monday, March 24. He also noted that if the Board of School Estimate had any specific

recommendations, they would be discussed and announced prior to public comments on Monday night and questioned whether they had to approve the budget on Tuesday, March 25.

Mrs. Sullivan responded that the budget has to be finalized and submitted to Trenton by April 8.

Dr. Alvarez and Dana Sullivan responded that the process is as follows:

Board of School Estimate decides on any changes to the base budget or separate proposal with regard to the dollar amounts or line items. If the Board of School Estimate decides on changes in the base budget, the Board of Education can reallocate dollars etc. but if changes are to the separate proposal, the Board of School Estimate must be specific on which items or dollars they wish to reduce and the Board of Education cannot put items in base budget.

Mayor Remsen noted that most towns vote on a school budget but Montclair has a flexible system, which gives the taxpayers of Montclair representation. He suggested that it may be possible for an additional meeting to be scheduled and questioned that if another meeting was needed, would it be announced to public.

Dana Sullivan responded that the law requires all meetings to be announced to public.

J. ADJOURNMENT

At 7:30 p.m. Gerald Tobin moved to adjourn the meeting; seconded by Jerold Freier and approved by a vote of 5 - 0.