

**March 10, 2022
Board of Finance
#1 Board of Education Budget Hearing
2022-2023**

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Lainie McHugh called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. All those present joined in a moment of silence for the victims of the war in the Ukraine.

The clerk called the role and recorded the following:

PRESENT

Lainie McHugh
Paul Timpanelli
Michael Barker
Marty Isaac
Scott Zimov
Elaine Hammers
Vincent DeGennaro – Alternate
Marc Mascola – Alternate
Christine El Eris – Alternate

ABSENT

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TRUMBULL TOWN CLERK
ALLES

Also present:

First Selectman Vicki Tesoro; Maria Pires, Finance Director; Kathleen McGannon, Chief Administrative Officer; Cynthia Katske, Chief Administrative Officer, Rebeca Lopez, Auditor; Dr. Martin Semmel, Superintendent of Schools; Susan Iwanicki, Assistant Superintendent; Paul Hendrickson, Business Manager; Lucinda Timpanelli, BOE; Regina Williams, Human Resources Director, Dr. Tammy Hartman, PPS Director; David Cote, Director of Operations, Christina Hefele, Director of Digital Learning

Chairman Lainie McHugh indicated this is the first of the two Board of Education Hearings held in person. The second, scheduled for Thursday, March 24, 2022 at 7:00 p.m. is in the Council Chambers. If you want to make a comment, you may do so at the public hearings scheduled for Saturday, March 19 at 10:00 a.m. via zoom and Tuesday, March 29 2021 at 7:00 p.m. via zoom. If you prefer, you can e-mail any comments to the Board of Finance at the following e-mail address: bof@trumbull-ct.gov

The First Selectman posted her recommended budget of \$189,524,715 on Monday, March 7, 2022. This represents a 2.94% increase over the current budget. The First Selectman is recommending the Board of Education receive \$115,665,558, a 3% increase of \$3,368,900 over the current year. This does not include the additional \$10,184,256 paid from the Town's operating budget on behalf of the Trumbull Public School. In total, the Board of Education receives 66% of the total recommended budget amount.

Dr. Semmel is here this evening to present the \$117,297,398 Board of Education operating budget, an increase of 4.45% or \$5,000,740 from last year.

Chairman McHugh turned the meeting over to Dr. Martin Semmel, Superintendent of Schools, who introduced the following individuals on the panel: Susan Iwanicki, Assistant Superintendent; Paul Hendrickson, Business Manager; Lucinda Timpanelli, Chairman, BOE; Regina Williams, Human Resources Director, Dr. Tammy Hartman, PPS Director; David Cote, Director of Operations, Christina Hefele, Director of Digital Learning.

Dr. Semmel began the presentation, indicating that salaries, benefits and purchased services represent 93.2% of the entire budget. The primary drivers are salaries, so less than a 4.45% increase would mean the majority of cuts would be staff related.

He went on to add that we are trying to rebuild the personnel infrastructure using selective hiring and the strategic use of Federal Grants. The salary requests include contractual increases and a reserve for negotiations.

An 8% increase for medical insurance coverage is also included with the final figure coming in March or April. We had hoped that this might be lower but it looks doubtful.

We expect a \$300,000 savings due to teacher turnover and we are reducing elementary school staff (3 FTEs) based on enrollment numbers. We also want to implement elementary Spanish and we are looking to eliminate the strings / band account deficit.

Dr. Semmel provided a history of the issues that took place, prior to when he started in September 2020.

In the 2019 – 2020 school year, there were financial concerns revealed, including the use cash accounts to help offset budget issues. In addition, the BOE hired Paras as subs rather than FTES, eliminating the need to pay benefits. During the Pandemic, the BOE realized savings because they closed the schools, but not enough to avert a crisis.

In 2020 – 2021, there were significant staff cuts made to balance the budget –24.5 certified and 8 non-certified – in all, 32.5 staff cuts. They did not feel the impact of this immediately, since they were still remote, but they did identify learning losses across all grade levels.

In 2021 - 2022, schools opened 100% and the learning loss became the primary concern. Due to this, we used the ESSR grants to eliminate the learning loss that we were facing instead of letting it continue where it would only get worse. We had an increase of 125 students at the elementary level that included 72 new IEPs and 50+ new English learners. With additional new English learners came additional mandates and in addition the free lunch program was showing an increase. Using the ESSR Grant Funds, we were able to add the 8.5 FTEs that we considered the most important ones at that time.

For the 2022 – 2023 budget, we have resolved most of the FTE issues and we are still trying to recover lost positions. The demographics in the state are changing and, as such, we are experiencing a rise in special education students, English language learners and free/reduced lunches.

In order to resolve the issue of possibly creating a funding cliff, we are using the APR Grant over a time. In 2020-21, we added 27 FTEs putting 15 in the budget and using APR Grant funds for the remaining 12 FTSS. In the 2022-2023 budget, we added an additional 4 of the 27 FTEs to the Budget, and funded the remaining 8 FTEs using APR funds. In the 2023-2024 budget, we will add an additional 4 of the 27 FTEs to the Budget, and fund the remaining 4 FTEs using APR funds. In the 2024-2025 budget, no additional FTEs to the Budget and, actually reduce the total FTEs to 21, not funding any EFTs using APR funds.

Dr. Semmel then discussed the per pupil expenditures. He indicated that we are in DRG B and rank 20th out of 21 with cost per pupil. As a point of comparison, he chose the town of Glastonbury due to its similarities in per capita income and population. Per pupil expense for Glastonbury is \$18,755, and when compared to our per pupil cost of \$ 17,579, we would need an additional 7.1% to reach their level. This proves the Board of Education is not overfunded.

Dr. Semmel then turned the meeting over to Regina Williams, Human Resources Director. Ms. Williams explained the difficulty she encountered when trying to determine the actual number of FTEs. We noted that no one had trained to use Munis for Human Resources, there were Union violations, and personnel added without approval outside the budget process. She went on to add that she has taken actions to reconcile the number of FTEs and formalize a new process for new staff. She also noted that the manual tracking of FTEs is dangerous / risky. She went on to add that they restored 15 paras as FTEs. In the budget, they are requesting an additional 5.5 paras and 12 certified staff.

Dr. Semmel closed the presentation indicating that BOE requested 4.45% but realistically would take 3.5% - 3.75%.

By unanimous consent, the meeting adjourned at 9:48 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Phyllis C. Collier

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Board of Financer Clerk