

SPECIAL MEETING OF THE PLAINVILLE BOARD OF EDUCATION
PLAINVILLE, CONNECTICUT
THURSDAY, JANUARY 28, 2021
VIRTUAL MEETING

Special Meeting Topics: 1) Additional Review of the Superintendent's Proposed Budget
2) Continuation of Board Budget Development Session
3) Other

Place and Time: Virtual Meeting @ 7:00 PM

Members Present: Brent Davenport, Deborah Hardy, Becky Martinez, Nicole Palmieri, Laurie Peterson,
Vice Chair Crystal St. Lawrence, Chair Becky Tyrrell, Kathy Wells and Foster White

Members Absent: None

Also Present: Steven K. LePage, Superintendent of Schools
David Levenduski, Asst. Superintendent of Schools
Sam Adlerstein, Director of Business and Operations

Early Departures: None

Board Chair Becky Tyrrell called the special meeting of the Plainville Board of Education to order at 7:03 PM.

Superintendent LePage stated that he and Mr. Adlerstein had addressed all budget questions sent to them from the Board. He then began with a brief PowerPoint presentation highlighting areas of critical importance to the schools. He stated that all students' needs are aligned with the District's Vision Statement. He then reviewed the goals of the Portrait of the Graduation; he discussed contractual obligations for 2021-22; COVID Grant offsets; Staffing Budget Requests; Newly Proposed Adjustments to the Superintendent's Budget; Review of the questions brought forth by the Board; and Risks in the Proposed Budget.

With regard to the COVID grant offsets, Mr. LePage reported that the district was awarded \$337,511 in ESSER Part I funding. Expenditures were allowed to be used for remote or in person learning to address the COVID epidemic. Fifty percent of the grant funding was used in 2020-21. The Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF) netted \$875,794 as a means of returning to in-person learning and has been fully spent down as required, by December 31, 2020. Part II of the ESSER grant is yet to be awarded. Funding is to be used for COVID related expenditures for intervention/acceleration; Family and Community; Mental Health; and Technology.

- ▶ The Superintendent's budget (with 2.84% increase) assumes \$100,000 of ESSER offsets.
- ▶ The Superintendent estimates that by the beginning of FY21-22, the district will have expended over \$1,000,000 of the above grants.
- ▶ The latest unofficial information indicates the ESSER Part II grant will be well in excess of the (ESSER/CARES Act) grant.
- ▶ As a way of reducing the proposed budget, the Superintendent and Board could justify and support some additional offset of ESSER funding.
- ▶ Increased staff and student support programs and software align with the ESSER II priorities that have been informally shared.
- ▶ The Superintendent and his staff cannot possibly know in advance the full extent and exact needs for a plan of recovery between now and September, 2023.

Mr. LePage then reviewed the proposed staffing requests:

One School Psychologist
One Family-School Liaison
One PHS Tutor—ELA
One PHS Tutor—Math

Technology Support Technician (as a means of reducing the proposed budget, he could support changing this position to part-time).

These five positions would total \$230,242. Each of these positions would benefit Plainville's students. With the reduction to part-time for the Technology position, cost would be \$205,242.

Mr. LePage then proposed an adjustment to the original proposed budget plan. The total budget proposed as of 01/21/21 was an increase of \$1,112,427 or 2.84% from last year. While changing the Technology Technician position to part-time, it would be a savings of \$25,000 and with the addition of ESSER offset funding of \$100,000, the increase would now be \$987,427 or 2.52%.

Mr. LePage reported that he has heard back from the State Department of Administrative Services with regard to the status of the enrollment commitment (352 students) at Wheeler School. The Town made a commitment to increase the enrollment at Wheeler School by 45 students and put a plan in place to attain that goal. The Town did increase the enrollment by thirty students, but due to circumstances well beyond anyone's control (COVID) this was not attained. Therefore, the Town asked the State to recognize that Wheeler School has netted the student population requirement for full grant eligibility. The State's reply states, "Final payment will not be issued until after the Town and school district report that the enrollment commitment of 352 students has been met, or on October 1, 2021, whichever is earlier. If the enrollment commitment has not been met by October 1, 2021, OSCGR will thereafter issue the final payment, with a calculation based on the current reported enrollment."

Foster White thanked Mr. LePage for his explanation of the project. He asked what the added cost would be if the district didn't meet student enrollment of 352 at Wheeler. Would the final calculation be a percentage? Would it negate the entire benefit of the average cost they were covering?

Mr. Alderstein answered that it would be worthwhile to do all that they can to meet the requirement, as the additional cost will be significant.

Mr. LePage then said that he is very proud of the budget he has put forth and would be happy with either of the two proposals. He stated that the addition of the five staff positions would give the students what they need and will help with post-pandemic recovery.

Mrs. Tyrrell then asked each Board of Education member to give their thoughts and/or recommendations about the budget and asked if they should move forward with the proposed 2.84% or 2.52%.

Town Council Chair Kathy Pugliese asked if the next round of CRF funds could be earmarked toward the budget. She stated that she had received information from Dr. Petit today stating that the State of Connecticut is set to receive \$159.3M for schools.

Mr. LePage stated that he was not aware of a second round of CRF funding. The district has already been allocated \$875,794. He will look into this further.

Becky Martinez hopes that the district is working on a plan to increase Pre-K student enrollment at Wheeler and also hopes that the district will be cautious with regard to grant funding. She stated that funding was earmarked to help students.

Mr. Levenduski stated that the district is ready for Pre-K and all students will have the supports they need.

Mr. LePage stated that he feels good about the proposals put forth. The 2.84% would give the district a bit of a cushion, but the 2.52% would be okay also.

Nicole Palmieri stated that with an unemployment rate of 7.3% and student enrollment down, is it the right time to add further positions to the budget? She is also concerned that State and Federal taxes will go up which is concerning for those who have lost their jobs. She asked what happens if the district doesn't receive the grant money, is there a contingency plan?

Mr. LePage stated that if there is no money allocated for the positions he will need to re-adjust. Should this take place, he would hope to have a discussion with the Town Council. He stated that budgets will change, they always do. At this time, the five positions are his focus.

Laurie Peterson thinks the budget amount is too high. The unemployment rate and uncertainty of things to come have left her concerned. What will happen if COVID continues and there is a hardship with regard to the economy. This is a whole new territory and the situation is a gamble.

Becky Tyrrell stated that the Board considers what is happening, but is also obligated to do what is best for the students.

Mr. LePage stated that he understands the concerns for the residents of Plainville and explained that throughout the pandemic the school system kept quite a few Plainville residents employed (as many residents work for the district). He stated that he is conscious of the taxpayers and understands what is going on, but he must put forth a budget he feels will be best for the district. Education can take you out of poverty. He stated that he is trying to create a solid and stable foundation for the students.

Becky Martinez stated that Plainville residents got a good look at the role that schools play in their community. During COVID Mr. LePage referenced various avenues for mental health help as well as lunches available for families. The schools are much more than a place to learn, it plays an important role in each child's life.

Nicole Palmieri stated that the Board must look at those who are older, whose children are grown and who don't benefit from the schools any longer. She asked, as a compromise, if the Board be would willing to keep the two tutor positions and one psychologist position.

Crystal St. Lawrence stated that children across the country have suffered greatly because of COVID this year. She is a mom and has seen firsthand what kids are going through. She is not in favor of eliminating any of the positions as they will be a part of the post-pandemic support.

Foster White stated he thought that the first proposal was a bare bones budget. He stated that the Technology Department has been invaluable to the district. They have provided in-school learning throughout the district that has been lauded by other towns. Their efforts allowed administrators and staff members to work from home and to answer phone calls. They also work on the Town side, and have helped the police and fire departments. What they have been able to do is admirable for both the school system and the community. He hopes the district will move forward with the approval of another Technician, perhaps someone who could start out part-time but would be willing to eventually go full-time. He also stated that many students are struggling and in need of extra attention. These positions are needed to help those children.

Becky Martinez asks that the Board not cut the Technician position. The district has given back unspent funds to the Town in the past. The Board and the Town have a good relationship. She feels that 2.52% is too low.

Crystal St. Lawrence is leaning toward the 2.84%.

Steve LePage stated that he and Mr. Adlerstein may have more information available prior to the February 8 Board meeting. He asks the Board to continue asking questions through the website and he and Mr. Alderstein will follow up.

Deborah Hardy stated that the Board must be considerate of the elderly and those who have lost their jobs. The Board needs to reconsider the proposed budget.

Mr. White stated that investing in education brings a positive value to real estate in town as well. As set forth in local entities, it is the responsibility of the Board to educate the youth in their town/community. The return on real estate reacts positively and the community becomes economically stable. He stated, as Board Members, they must clearly communicate that education is the town's largest asset and that it benefits everyone. By making an investment in education, the town is afforded a quality school system which brings people into town. What Plainville's Special Education department has done is an example. They do whatever they can to keep children in-house. If they didn't, budgets would be significantly higher. He feels that 2.84% is fine and would bring quality services to the education system. If we re-think this issue, look at the benefits it affords students and the entire community.

Nicole Palmieri stated that our students are getting a very good education. However, the Board wouldn't be doing its job if they rubber stamped all that is asked for.

Deborah Hardy stated that this year hasn't been as good as most years. The Board must reconsider but thanked Mr. LePage for putting forth a budget he felt was in the best interests of Plainville's students.

Both Mr. LePage and Mr. Adlerstein stated that they have a good partnership with the Council and should the need arise, would feel comfortable going to the Town Council for further discussion.

Becky Tyrrell stated that like all of the decisions the Board had to make this year, this is another tough one. She also is concerned about what the impact will be if negative things happen, but stated that the Board of Education's job is to do what is best for the kids. She knows everyone on the Board has different opinions but all are doing their best. The Board's consensus is as follows:

The consensus:

Brent Davenport—would agree to 2.52% budget

Deborah Hardy—does not agree, asks to cut further

Becky Martinez—agrees with 2.84% budget

Nicole Palmieri—does not agree, asks to cut further

Laurie Peterson-- does not agree, asks to cut further

Crystal St. Lawrence-- agrees with 2.84% budget

Kathy Wells-- agrees with 2.84% budget

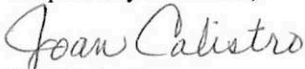
Foster White-- agrees with 2.84% budget

Becky Tyrrell-- agrees with either proposals

The Board will forward more questions to Mr. LePage and will vote at the February 8th Board meeting.

A MOTION WAS MADE BY FOSTER WHITE TO ADJOURN THE SPECIAL MEETING AT 8:35 PM. THE MOTION WAS SECONDED BY DEBORAH HARDY. THE MOTION UNANIMOUSLY CARRIED 9-0.

Respectfully submitted,



Joan Calistro

Recorder of Minutes