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TOWN OF EAST HAVEN BOARD OF FINANCE

MINUTES FOR THURSDAY MARCH 11, 2021, AT 6:30 P.M. BUDGET WORKSHOP SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING

Noreen Clough read into the record:

**TO THE RESIDENTS AND TAXPAYERS OF THE TOWN OF EAST HAVEN
AND OTHER INTERESTED PARTIES:**

Due to Governor Ned Lamont's March 10, 2020 declaration of a public health emergency and civil preparedness emergency and his subsequently issued Executive Orders 7B and 7D: and, due to the spread of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 in the State of Connecticut including New Haven County, in-person public access to this meeting will not be permitted. **This will be a 100% electronic meeting.**

**The Public can access and participate in this Meeting
from a computer, tablet, or smartphone:
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The East Haven Board of Finance held a Board of Finance Budget Workshop meeting on Thursday, March 11, 2021 which commenced at 6:30 P.M. via ZOOM, to transact the following:

Roll Call:

Rich DePalma, Noreen Clough, Beth Purcell, Rich Esposito, Ralph Vitale, and Al Purzycki were present. Mayor Joseph Carfora was absent. Jim Keeley, Finance Director was also present.

Board of Education

Erica Forte presented for this department and stated this is a little different doing this virtually. She thanked the Board for having her. She condensed the presentation and made it more concise.

Erica shared here screen and spoke about the 2021/2022 BOE proposed budget. The Mission of the East Haven Public Schools is to provide a variety of learning experiences and a rigorous comprehensive education in a safe and nurturing environment to prepare all students to be college and career ready. We are driven by this mission which is grounded in educational excellence. This district mission in our vision emphasizes that all students will graduate college and/or career ready for their future. Crafting this educational budget, during a pandemic shadowed by the some of the economic realities that are facing our town and our state was really complicated and challenging. This year's budget more than ever requires a delicate balance between remaining steadfast to our mission while ensuring that we are faithful stewards to our taxpayers.

In addition to our mission we have our beliefs and the proposed budget really embodies the core beliefs that are set forth by the district and the board. They do support the board goals around culture and climate, academics, talent, finance, and operations. I know over the last couple of years I have talked to you a lot about those goals. Those goals are very clear. When we talk about culture and climate, we are referring to positive learning environments that are safe with high quality teaching and learning. Engaging families in the communities as partners in their children's education and the educational process.

Goal number 2 is around operation and fiscal. Those are systems and processes that promote organizational efficiency and effectiveness and they also include the use of time and financial resources in this goal.

Goal number 3 is around academics . Rigorous aligned engaging academic programs where every student can achieve to their highest potential. This includes aligned curriculum and instruction and assessments and programing that aims for universal career and college ready.

Goal 4 is talent. We are only as good as our people. Really strong systems and strategies to recruit and hire, develop, evaluate, and retain phenomenal school leaders, teachers, and support staff.

Our budget is grounded in these 4 goals. This year we engaged in a budget process beginning in October or November where communication was sent out to administrators and department heads where we have meetings and budget support sessions. Once we had the information from our key leaders and department heads in December and January, we drafted a proposed budget

and started presenting to the Board of Education. In February or the end of January, the Board adopted the Superintendent's proposed budget, which then became the BOE proposed budget and then we submitted it to Town Hall on February 3rd. Here we are at BOF and then we will head to Town Council and we will get the Town's formal budget allocation for the Board and then sometime in June the Board will most likely have to make adjustments based on the appropriation and will approve a final 2021/2022 operating budget.

Erica Forte then spoke about the district and demographics. There is about 9% our students are second language learners. This is continually rising and even though this is going up every year, we do have second language learners who are meeting state benchmark guidelines and are exited from the status of being an English learner. Every year we have about 265 students. A certain portion of those, usually 40 to 50, will exit the ESL program and then we will see an influx of students coming in. Special Education this year, about 15.9% or roughly 456 of our students qualify for special education services. We are becoming more diverse. About 58% white, and the rest of the percentage, Hispanic, black, and Asian create a nice diversity for us.

We are still waiting on some of the figures for the state to release relative to 2019/20. Obviously it was a strange year and some of the data may look skewed here because it was only calculated through March before the shutdown but we have almost 80% of our students taking college and career readiness courses at the high school in preparation to enter their post-secondary education.

We have an accountability index. Every district across the state is provided an accountability index. As you can see, we fall below the state average, but you can also see we went from an index of 64.2 back in 2015/16 to an index of 69.7 in 2018/19. I don't believe we are going to see an index for 19/20 because the state applied for a waiver for standardized testing for the smarter balance assessment for all students for grades 3 through 8 and the SAT school day for students in high school in grade 11. We are hoping this year we will see a standardize testing assessment go through as planned and we will be able to measure a new accountability index and a baseline in which to start from.

We have 86.3% of our students on track to graduate. That figure is from 2018/19 but on track to graduate means any student in 9th grade is earning 5 or more credits by the end of Freshman year and is on track to earn a diploma within 4 years. Our on track for 19/20 was 90.3%. The state has not yet reported that formally on the website. These are figures taken right from a public website called Edsite that the state puts out that anyone in the public can have access to.

Last year I spoke about a key area of focus being attendance for students and working on chronic absenteeism. Back in 16/17 we had 15.7% of our students considered chronically absent. That means they were missing 10% or more of the school year. If they were in attendance for 180 days and they were missing 18 days or more. If they were in attendance for 30 days, they were missing 3 days or more. Through 19/20 we got that figure down to 10.7%. However, in 19/20 this data was only calculated through March which is when we saw the shutdown last spring and schools were closed. This is a great figure because usually in March we are seeing a chronic absent rate around 15 and 17 but as we accrue more days during the school year and we head

towards June, that number comes down. To be at 10.7 in March of last year is a big accomplishment for us.

Another big effort of ours is our suspension and expulsion rate and that directly correlates to culture and climate. What we see is a huge decline in our suspension and expulsion rate and this 19/20 data is only projected through March.

We have 4-year graduation rates and trends. 2019/20 is a self-reported number. We are waiting for the official release. This represents the percentage of first-time 9th graders who graduate with a regular high school diploma in four years or less and it is all students regardless of designation, whether special ed, 504, or second language.

We have seen a little bit of an increase in enrollment this year. Our full in person learning model has drawn some of our students back to our district who may have been attending magnet schools in New Haven. Generally, it has stabilized over the last few years. You can see the birth rates and for us anywhere between 180 and 200 kindergarten students is where we are seeing our enrollment projection. Our budget does include 3 additional elementary teachers for enrollment increases that we will see that at several of our elementary schools.

Our overall district enrollment over the course of several years as is true with most districts throughout CT, we experience fluctuation in student enrollment as our district is a bit more transient. We monitor these changes closely to make the most appropriate staffing decisions each school year. Sometimes we are faced with the need to open additional classrooms after the school year has started for late registrations and enrollments. Although we only have 2,894 students, we are still fiscally responsible for an additional 407 students who attend magnet schools, including voag schools and technical schools. We have 40 home schooled students and 89 students attending independent and parochial schools.

We have seen an increase in our staffing since 2016 and 2017. This is a result of instead of outsourcing services such as speech and occupational therapy and pt, we have hired people internally to service those students as BOE employees and we have also increased the number of paraprofessionals we had in district. We have added paraprofessionals not only in our kindergarten classrooms but also in our grade ? (inaudible) as well as additional instructional paras and intervention paras. Our overall goal for this budget was to deliver one that is clear, accurate and detailed. We want to provide transparency and want the community, BOF and others to have confidence in our budget. We want to maintain a high-quality programming and operation at all levels, while adjusting when necessary as you heard me speak to before when our staffing needs to meet enrollment and organizational demands. We also want to continue important ongoing instructional improvements, through our high quality professional development curriculum, our technology that also enhances our 21st century learning and then fiscal responsibilities and looking for opportunities to reduce overall operating costs and limit any potential increases or liability to future budgets.

Our budget components for 2021/2022 is a request of an increase for 2.14 % or just over One Million dollars. Ms. Forte presented a slide of an overview. This year we broke down the salaries into certified salaries and non-certified salaries so you can see the change. It will result

in the overall 3.24% increase in total salaries for certified and non-certified. There is a bit of reduction in employee benefits. Overall, for each one of the categories we have explanations. It goes without saying that instructional costs that are associated with learning gaps as a result of interrupted educational experiences and some of our operational costs to ensure the safety and health of our well being constitute additional challenges that may over shadow our attempts to achieve some costs efficiencies but I will go through each category.

Certified salaries. This is a result of contractual obligations. It does include 3 high school positions and 3 elementary school positions. The high school positions are in an effort to continue to offer a block schedule. This year as part of a mitigation strategy for COVID and bringing students back full in person, we decided to move to a block schedule, we did it quickly but it allowed us to have fewer transitions for kids during the day and keep kids in classes with teachers for longer periods of time. The feedback from administration, teachers and students is that they really like it. We did this very quickly and as a result kids are sitting in study halls as opposed to more elective offerings and so by adding 3 high school positions which would be for business, art, and math we can maintain the block schedule while reducing the number of periods kids are sitting in study halls and get more creative with our elective offerings and allow kids earn more credits. We also see the need at the elementary level for a teacher at Deer Run, Ferraro and Momauguin for enrollment expansions that we absorbed in this year's budget and the anticipated need for next year. That is why you see an increase for certified salaries.

For non-certified, this has to do with contractual obligations and projected increases for paraprofessionals, custodians, maintenance that are or will be completed with negotiations, but it also includes ensuring that all of these contracts are in compliance with minimum wage increases. This line also accounts for an increase in hours for our paraprofessionals in kindergarten and first grade from 19.5 to 25 hours per week. This allows our paraprofessionals to support our teachers and students in the classrooms for longer periods of time throughout the day. It averages out to about \$3,500.00 additional per year, per para across those first-grade paras, kindergarten paras and instructional paras. We value them and the work that they do and having additional hours could result in a lot of additional support for kids, the teachers, and the school itself.

A small cut to the benefits line. Given some new contracts that we are negotiating that will start on 7/1 with increased employee cost share. This line is for medical benefits which accounts for 5.5 million but also additional costs like worker's compensation, life insurance, Medicare supplemental, fica, flexible spending, unemployment, Mers and things of that nature.

In the professional services line (300), there is an increase here related to special education costs. We budgeted here in this line for what we have been spending in the past relative to professional services for special education and we wanted to accurately have it represented in this line. We adjusted our sports liability insurance in this line to the actual cost of \$27,000.00. We did reduce a bit on the attorney's fees only because we have one contract to negotiate next year. We did see an increase in attorney fees this year because of the need to negotiate additional MOUs and personnel things related to the COVID and the Cares Act.

In the 400 line, you can see a big decrease there. This is down due to moving \$190,000.00 which was part of our old lease for our technology. If you look at the 700 line down below, we have moved the lease from an actual lease to an equipment line. Due to Covid, the state has been generous in sending hardware to the district, so we did not need to execute a lease to purchase additional chrome books last year. We moved the cost of lease from the 400 line and put it in the operational budget under the new replacement equipment line, the 700 line. That is why you see a decrease in the 400 line and an increase in the 700 line.

In the 500 line you can see an increase. Our purchase services are up about \$95,000.00. This is an increase for out of district tuition costs. We send students to Sound School, Lyman Hall, Wintergreen, and those are tuition schools. This year we have 15 students at the Sound School, next year we will have 18 based on legislation and how that enrollment is calculated. You have to admit an average of the past 3 years of the 9th grade enrollment. In the year 2022/2023, at the end of that year and moving forward every year thereafter, it will always remain 3 because I have worked with the Sound School and adjusted it so we can always have a predictable number at the Sound School. That line is about increased tuition costs. After 2021/2022 we will see a reduction in that line. Moving forward we will remain consistent at the Sound School given the legislation.

In the textbook line there is a small increase there relative to instructional materials and supplies, refurbishing classroom libraries and books in our media centers which our principals have requested. In the 700 line I talked about that earlier this is an increase due to the movement of the computer lease from the 400 line to the 700 line for computer equipment replacement. In the 800 line there is a small increase there because we moved the cost of dues and fees associated with aces and managing the medical account from the 200 line, so this line is adequately categorized in the correct line budgeted item.

When you look at all these increases in terms of a pie chart, we need our teachers and we need our teachers to be healthy. 75% of our budget is our staff and their health, their benefits. We are a people business. Our kids need their teachers and staff every single day. The other 25% of the budget is broken up amongst the other components presented previously.

In terms of grant funding, our grant funding this year was just over nine million dollars. This was a lot more than what was experienced in the past. Mostly because we had the ESSER funds, which were recovery act funds for about \$640,000.00. We had one competitive ? grant for \$64,000.00 that helped put large format displays in additional classrooms across the district. Then we were awarded these Corona Relief funds for \$2.9 million dollars. We used those funds to offset some of the cost associated with opening school in a full in person model this school year with sanitation attendants, bus attendance, additional PPE, storage for removing furniture so we could create more distancing, printing supplies and other operational costs relative to cleaning and keeping a healthy and safe environment.

Next year's grants are not quite as high, although we do anticipate some ESSER funds and there may be additional funds as part of a rescue package that we don't have a lot of details on yet. We anticipate our standard grant funding outside of these red components. With any additional

competitive funding that comes our way, or that is available we will certainly put in our applications and are generally successful.

For 2021/22, our appropriation is 2.14%. A little over a million dollars. It includes 3 new high school teachers, 3 elementary positions but also remaining consistent so we can close the gap and ensure that we are prepared to deal with disruption in education that our students have faced. Some of the academic, social, and emotional gaps that they may come back with.

In summary we think it is a responsible request with a focus on continued academic, social, and emotional growth and achievement for our students. We want to offer our students and our families a competitive academic program at all levels while addressing some of our elective and extracurricular interests. Our district needs to be complete along the shoreline as school choice forces us to be and do better. We know our students have options and in many cases we are bound to pay for tuition for out of district schools but we also know that our high school is robust with learning and interest opportunities as we prepare for our accreditation at the high school in 2021. We are trying to design a budget that sustains program strength yet expands opportunities for students while being mindful of the taxpayers' dollar.

Drivers such as salaries and benefits account for more than 75% of our budget and we understand the fiscal constraints of the town and we have reviewed the Mayor's proposed budget, including the proposed allocation for the BOE. We are currently negotiating our transportation contract as well as two additional bargaining unit contracts which can have an impact on our request as these 3 things become finalized. We can update our budget request accordingly to reflect any changes or savings that we may realize.

Rich DePalma stated he thought they did a great job this year with the environment with who was at school or who wanted to stay out of school.

Ms. Forte stated sports are open and we know it does not come without risk but our whole stance and the Board have been incredibly supportive. We want people to have choice. If you think we are doing a good job and you are comfortable with sending your kids for in person learning we are open, if not we have a remote option available. We started with one type of remote learning and we got a lot of feedback on it and started making changes so that it became for live and interactive. For various reasons if families have to make the decisions to keep their children home, we value that and respect that. We know our kids learn best at school and they need opportunity to interact with adults to develop those relationships and each other in a school setting with various activities such as sports.

Al P asked if anyone in her staff or legal looked at the new Covid 19 relief package for availability for funds. Ms. Forte referred to a slide and stated these corona relief funds had to be expended by December 31st. The ESSER funds we have till September 2022 but that is a small amount and pretty much expended there. We are expecting a second round of ESSER funds and we have to do a needs assessment for those funds, and we have to fill out a grant application for those funds. We are working on that application now. It is due in about a month. I have heard some information not explicit by any means, about a rescue package and I think that might be what you are referring to. I don't have any details on that package or what the criteria will be for

how you apply for those funds or what the actual funding amount will be. It will certainly impact or change how we move forward in the budget process, so I appreciate you bringing that up.

Noreen stated it was a tough year and she commended Ms. Forte. We have 2894 students. What % is learning from home? Ms. Forte stated at the beginning of the year we started out with about 75% of our inaudible. After Christmas break, we saw that jump to 30% of our students as remote learners and 70% as in person learners. We are now seeing kids coming back. We are probably around 27 and 28% but overall, we have maintained between 25 and 30% of our students as remote learners. Having 70 to 75% in person learning. This does not account for when we had to put classrooms in quarantine or close the school for a couple of weeks.

Ms. Forte stated we did a parent survey after the first couple months and between 75 and 80% of parents were happy both parents were available.

Ralph Vitale stated he is very happy for them (inaudible).

Rich DePalma asked if there was a need to increase staff between in person/remote learning. Ms. Forte stated they managed to do ok. All districts were scrambling for staff. Some of the Corona relief funds and ESSER funds were dedicated to not only adding sanitation attendants and bus attendants but also increasing paraprofessional hours. Any para working 19.5 hours or 27 were able to work up to the 31 hours per week and that helped. The state offered some flexibilities for certifications for substitutes and so we were able to hire additional subs and did not have to have a degree, the state provided a waiver. We had a lot of college students who normally speaking would never sub in a school, who were able to come and sub for us. We increased our staff in terms of subs and hours. There are still a couple of vacant positions that we are trying to fill. Some of our staff have taken on a sixth course under a MOU to cover some of those classes. Staffing shortages are across every district and have managed to handle it and stay open.

For retention and development, we are partnering with Southern CT for intern and field work placements. I had a great meeting with SHU where we are looking to build residency schools and get Sacred Heart interns here, not only for internship but also for student teachers and looking for ways to partner with our universities where we can build a talent pipeline internally within our schools. We were just approached by ? as part of the ? alliance to do another type of teacher residency talent pipeline for our district. We are looking forward to implementing those components as part of that goal.

Rich DePalma asked if she sees a need for a summer ? for parents to feel they want something more out of the year for their children. Ms. Forte stated that as part of the ESSER 2 application we do want to look into the school day at the elementary level, but we also want to look at robust summer programs. In the past we have done programs that are from 9 to 12 and may not meet parents needs or wants. They are looking for a longer day. We are looking to combine this idea of what we used to have with this compass program which was an after school summer camp more enrichment opportunity with a traditional summer school which is a longer day, which affords the parents the option to have their kids in for part of the day or a longer day but also

provides kids with the opportunities to get some interventions and academics and enrichment, social and emotional and physical activity. It provides with a choice. The staff has worked tirelessly all year. This provides a choice for the staff. You can work a full day or a half day.

Noreen thanked all the staff, principals, teachers.

Ms. Forte was asked by Rich DePalma if she was planning for Covid into September as well.

It is hard to gauge and I was on the phone with other superintendents, and while we are thrilled, we are getting ESSER funds, etc. it is hard to do quality planning when it is still unknown if we are going to have to provide in person and remote learning at the same time, or if we are going to be an all-in person learning. We are trying to get a handle on what the recommendation is going to be after people are vaccinated and we look at the positively rates. There is a lot of funding that is potentially out there. We want to make sure we are adequately planning for that funding and that we are utilizing it effectively.

Ms. Forte stated that while it has been really challenging and while we abruptly changed and had a lot of disruption, some of it was great disruption that created a lot of growth and challenged us in so many ways and the flexibility and response on so many of our staff's part has been tremendous. We have all learned a lot in a short period of time. I think that there are things that have resulted from some of this change and I think we need to evaluate and hold on to in the future. For example, we used to do homebound instruction and used to hire tutors sometimes for medical, expulsion, etc. Now that we have been accustomed to remote learning, is the idea of sending a tutor to a child's home or meeting in a commonly agreed upon place to provide instruction necessary if we can provide children to remote in for classrooms.

Rich DePalma asked if she anticipated a lot of retirements this June. We had a lot of inaudible retirements during the school year. I believe 2 administrators and one teacher at this point.

We had some retirements at the end of last year and we had some retirements at the start of school year and some mid- year retirements as well. The retirements that we know of are factored into the budget.

Rich DePalma asked how the new field is. Ms. Forte is hoping to host a graduation on it this year.

Beth Purcell made a motion to adjourn at 7:21 P.M, Noreen Clough seconds.

Sue Mauro

BOF Clerk

