

**March 9, 2023  
Board of Finance  
#1 Board of Education Budget Hearing  
2023-2024**

**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.

The clerk called the role and recorded the following:

**PRESENT**

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

**ABSENT**

**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; Dean Catalano, Director of Pupil Personnel Services; Joseph Chella, Director of Human Capital and Talent Development; David Cote, Director of Operations, Christina Hefele, Director of Digital Learning; Jeff Hackett, Technology Manager.

If you want to make a comment, you may do so at the public hearings scheduled for Saturday, March 18 at 10:00 a.m. at the Town Hall and Tuesday, March 28, 2023 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 \$196,874,526 on Monday, March 6, 2023. This represents a 3.41% increase over the current fiscal year. The First Selectman is recommending the Board of Education receive \$119,740,771, a 3% increase of \$3,825,213 over the current year.

Dr. Semmel is here this evening to present the \$121,693,693 Board of Education operating budget, an increase of 4.98% or \$5,778,135 from last year.

Dr. Semmel began the presentation indicating that salaries, benefits, and purchased services represent 93.1% of the entire budget for this year. The primary driver is salaries that represent 65% of the budget request and are contractual. He indicated that the budget is lean this year and he added only one additional staff member. He will show the possible impact of a 3.3% increase on the Board of Education.

He recognized that a representative of the Board of Finance (Michael Barker) was present at the Board of Education Finance Committee meetings this past year in response to a request made during last year's budget hearing and he noted that Mary Isaac of the Town Council Finance Committee has also been present at the meetings.

Dr. Semmel indicated that we are still emerging from Covid and the children are still being impacted from the loss of in-person learning. As a district, we prioritize our goals and when planning the budget, we were

aware of inflation and the impact of the revaluation on families as well as the impact of the teacher contract negotiations. The teachers have taken a 1% lower rate in their contract negotiations as compared to the overall state average.

In preparing the budget, he noted that they also took into consideration the increases in transportation and health costs, as well as a decline in our ESSO Grant Funding, and the goals of the 5-year Technology Plan that will be fully funded with the 4.98% request.

The 4.98% budget increase included the following, 2.87% is due to salaries and benefits; 1.05% for purchased services – Transportation; PPS Outplaced Tuition; Energy and Utilities; and 1.06% for Elementary strings/band; property; supplies and all other.

A comparison of area schools in our DRG shows the Trumbull budget request to be in line --Trumbull is ranked 8 out of 20 and our per pupil expense ranks 20 out of 21, which clearly shows how efficient we are with our funds.

Our enrollment is not going down and we cannot sustain our high level of education with less than 4.98%, since the current staffing cannot be sustained with a 3.3% increase. We are projecting 6,957 students for next year. We projected 6,856 for this year and the actual number was 6,941. We currently have 6,992 students.

The Literary specialists and Math coaches are vital members of our team and they are the major reason all of our students have equitable access to our curriculum. These folks are able to help eliminate or reduce learning gaps so children don't wind up in a special education situation. There are still gaps that exist with students that are on paid lunch and free or subsidized lunch. Our goal is to eliminate those gaps. If the children wind up in special education it becomes a more expensive situation. We need to address these gaps by third grade or the gaps will get worse.

Dr. Semmel reviewed his plan for Certified Staffing Changes. The net change in teachers is 0 and in administrators the change is +1. He went on to add that the Trumbull public schools have more students per administrator than surrounding schools.

He indicated that changes being made reflect the loss of ESSO Grant Funding; positions are being moved to the operating budget not being eliminated.

Changes made to the Non-Certified changes include the addition of .5 custodian to assist with the changes in the lunch program at THS and +2 athletic trainers for THS.

Mr. Dean Catalano presented the PPS budget. The increase in the budget is due to inflation and significant tuition rates for outplacement. Tuition rates have increased between 6-10% and at an average \$100,000 per year per student, not including special transportation, can be quite costly.

These 44 children also require more specialized services, i.e. speech pathologists, nurses, psychologists, etc., to insure they are being provided with a Free and Appropriate Public Education. Elite/NCB's and our REACH programs provide a cost savings of hundreds of thousands of dollars to the District, reducing the need to outplace an additional 13 students.

For the 2022-2023 year we had 10 students move into this district that required adult support. These positions have become increasingly more difficult to staff and fully staffing with paras will mitigate the costs associated with outplacements.

We are not looking to add any additional certified staff for the 2023-2024 school year.

Dr. Semmel indicted that Mr. Jeffrey Hackett would presented the Technology Plan. He indicated that they put together a plan that encompasses both leasing and purchasing options. He went on to add that purchasing would be a better option with interest rates increasing; however, the options should be reviewed each year. He also indicated that Mr. DeGennaro made significant contributions to this endeavor.

Mr. DeGennaro indicated that he worked with Mr. Hackett who identified what would need to be addressed over the next 5 years. He indicated we had the ability to do both and can make changes as we go along.

Mr. Hackett indicated that the 5 year plan he prepared looks at leases, purchases, and hybrids. He concurred with Dr. Semmel in that it would be better to buy outright, noting that the equipment does last longer in the education system. He went on to add that monthly payments are costs that you can't get away from and once you buy outright you eliminate interest payments.

Dr. Semmel continued his discussion, indicating what would need to be eliminated if they were to keep his increase to 3.3%, i.e., cutting \$1.95 million:

New Assistant Principal	\$141,640	Closing Building on Weekends	\$100,000
Eliminate TAG Program	\$118,741	Increase of Strings & Band Fees	\$25,000
Technology	\$322,600	Increase of Athletics Fees	\$150,000
Eliminate Biotechnology at Agrisci	\$105,000	Security Overtime	\$20,000
Reduce 5.0+ Teacher FTE's	\$400,000	Textbooks and Curric Writing	\$121,000
Reduce 2.0+ Interventionists	\$160,000		
Reduction in Non-certified Staff	\$ 80,000		
TOTAL POTENTIAL CUTS		\$1,743,981	

There would still need to be an additional \$200,000 in cuts.

Dr. Semmel indicated that they left the State Partnership Plan without incurring a penalty, for a savings of \$70,000 to \$100,000.

Title 1 Grants for free and reduced lunch are based on the information provided by the Town. It was noted that Frenchtown and Middlebrook schools have a higher percentage of free lunches. Students coming from disadvantage backgrounds usually need reading help which would indicate a need for additional FTE's.

By unanimous consent, the meeting adjourned at 9:47 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Phyllis C. Collier

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Board of Financer Clerk