

**TOWN OF SIMSBURY
BOARD OF EDUCATION**

Record of Proceedings

Regular Meeting

January 9, 2024

Mr. Jeff Tindall called the meeting to order at 6:31 p.m. in the Board of Education Conference Room.

Roll Call:

Members present: Mmes. Jen Batchelar and Jessica Parise. Messrs. Jeff Tindall, Brian Watson and Josh Falco. Ms. Thomas arrived at 6:38 p.m.

Members absent: Mmes. Tara Willerup and Lydia Tedone.

Also present: Superintendent Matt Curtis, Assistant Superintendent Sue Homrok-Lemke, Assistant Superintendent Neil Sullivan, Director of Finance Amy Meriwether, BOE Student Representative Matthew Picoult and Recording Secretary Katie Wilde.

PUBLIC AUDIENCE

None.

COMMITTEE REPORTS/BOE COMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Picoult reported on the HJMS career fairs and SpongeBob rehearsals. He stated that Tariffville is close to moving into their modular classrooms. SHS midterms are this week and preparations for the musical are underway.

Ms. Lemke reported that Friday is an early release day during which professional development will be held on various topics. Mr. Curtis stated that the 2022-23 Annual Report is now available on our website and in print. He noted it includes a data dashboard aligned with the board's four goals.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

A. Approval of Minutes of December 12, 2023

Mr. Watson: MOVE to approve the minutes of the December 12, 2023 meeting.

Ms. Batchelar: Seconded. So moved.

B. Personnel

Mr. Watson: MOVE that the Board of Education accept the resignations of Nicole Cormier effective December 31, 2023 and Megan Laponese effective January 19, 2024.

Ms. Parise: Seconded. So moved.

C. Acceptance of Gift from Ensign Bickford

Public Audience

Communications

Approval of Minutes of December 12, 2023

Personnel

Acceptance of Gift from Ensign Bickford

Ms. Parise: MOVE that the proposed gift of \$12,500 to STEM K-12 from the Ensign-Bickford Aerospace & Defense Company be accepted.

Ms. Batchelar: Seconded. So moved.

INFORMATION AND REPORTS

A. 2024-25 Budget: Special Education Program Review

Katie Krasula, Director of Pupil Services, provided a review of the work of Pupil Services along with informative data relative to the 2024-25 budget. She stated that the department met the requirements in the state Annual Performance Report for 2022 and the results for 2023 are pending.

Ms. Krasula addressed the focus areas for special education this year. These include a refocus on service delivery, the Intensive Learning Needs program, professional development regarding behavior, service delivery, high quality IEP's and for paraeducators, CT SEDS, the increasing incident rate and complexity of needs of our students. Ms. Krasula thanked the board members for their support in the current budget that added special ed teachers at the elementary schools to address caseload needs.

Ms. Krasula provided context to current programming and budget requests. She stated the two major focus points are increased enrollment and the incidence rate; and the increased complexity of needs. Ms. Krasula presented a 5 year comparison of enrollment increases. In the past 5 years district enrollment increased by 79 students, and enrollment in special ed increased by 90 students. Ms. Krasula addressed the incidence rate, pointing out the increase in Simsbury which is now commiserate with the state. She noted the increase in needs for students in preschool and the number of move-ins with special ed needs.

Ms. Krasula stated the funding sources for special ed are the operational budget, Excess Cost Grant and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) grant. She explained that for the Excess Cost Grant the per pupil expenditure must exceed 4.5 times the per pupil expenditure for the district. The threshold for Simsbury is \$87,824. In 2022-23 the district received a 73.1% reimbursement for the expenditures over the threshold. The expected reimbursement rate for 2023-24 is 68%. Mr. Curtis noted that the excess cost grant is supposed to be funded at a rate of 85%. He stated that last year the district was told that we would be reimbursed at a rate of 81% and the reduction creates challenges for how we plan.

Ms. Krasula reviewed out of district data. She stated that last year we had 49 outplacements and this year we have 48 outplacements. She noted that the cost of these tuitions averaged \$81,342 in 2022-23 and now average \$92,887 in 2023-24. Mr. Curtis stated that last year the BOF covered a \$500,000 deficit in special ed.

Mr. Tindall asked why students are outplaced. Ms. Krasula responded that it depends on the scope of the disability. It ranges from significant learning disabilities to significant behavioral disabilities. The Planning & Placement Team discusses whether the student's environment is meeting the needs of their severity. Ms. Thomas asked if outplaced students ever return to the district. Ms. Krasula

Special Ed
Program
Review/Budget

responded that the goal is to have these students return and a few each year are able to return to their less restrictive school environment.

Ms. Thomas asked about the transportation costs. Ms. Krasula responded that there hasn't been a great change from the past. She stated that transportation will be included in her budget, but it is not a major driver for her budget requests. Mr. Curtis noted that post-COVID Salters can no longer field the number of drivers they had in the past and third party vendors have to be used whose prices have greatly increased. Ms. Lemke stated that we share rides with other districts when we can.

Ms. Krasula addressed the Intensive Learning Needs (ILN) program. She stated that students in this program require a multitude of services and team members. She noted this program takes a lot of collaboration and communication as these students are unable to tell their parents how their day went. Ms. Krasula provided a 3 year comparison of move-ins to the program. In 2021-22 there was 1 move-in. In 2022-23 there were 5 move-ins. In 2023-24 there have been 11 move-ins. Mr. Tindall asked how these caseloads have been affected. Ms. Krasula responded that caseloads are around 10 students, which is large for this program.

Ms. Krasula reviewed high school comparative caseload data. In the Farmington Valley the range for caseloads is 15-23. At SHS the caseload range is 24-32. Ms. Krasula addressed middle school reading needs. She stated we have an increase in the number of students requiring structured literacy instruction. Working with these students is time intensive and has specific teacher training requirements. Currently we have 21 students whose needs are being addressed through contracted services. Next year we anticipate 31 students will require this instruction.

Ms. Krasula reviewed preschool data. Over the past 6 years preschool students who require specialized instruction has increased from 21 students to a projected 58 students at year end.. Ms. Krasula stated that the district is required to evaluate all students in the Birth to 3 program and determine if they meet the public school criteria for special ed services.

Ms. Krasula reviewed the department's budget requests for 2024-25, based on the data that has been presented. The special ed budget requests include 2 ILN certified special ed teachers, 1 ILN program coordinator, 1 SHS special ed teacher, 1 reading specialist at HJMS, and 1 preschool special ed teacher. Ms. Lemke noted that we had an ILN coordinator previously, but when she retired we eliminated the position and spread out the responsibilities but that is not working out. Ms. Batchelar asked how many students are in the ILN program. Ms. Krasula responded that there are currently 40 students and we project 43 students next year based on our preschool enrollment.

Ms. Krasula stated that additional budget concerns include related service staffing and out of district tuition funding. Ms. Parise asked if there are commonalities among the out of district schools. Ms. Krasula responded that there are multiple buckets and we continue to look at whether we should change our program offerings with regard to autism and mental health behavior.

B. Committee Assignments

Mr. Tindall reviewed the board members' committee assignments.

Committee
Assignments

Public Audience

PUBLIC AUDIENCE

None.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Watson: MOVE to adjourn the meeting at 7:47 p.m.

Ms. Batchelar: Seconded. So moved.

Sharon Thomas
Secretary

Katie Wilde
Recording Secretary

Adjournment