

**GUILFORD BOARD OF EDUCATION
MONDAY, JANUARY 30, 2006
GUILFORD HIGH SCHOOL, GUILFORD, CONNECTICUT**

1. Call to Order

Chairman Bloss called the meeting to order at 7:45 p.m. Board of Education members present were Keith Bishop, William Bloss, Cynthia Cartier, Barbara Dudley, Louis Iorio, Alan Meyers, Naomi Migliacci, Kathleen Nolan and Ted Zuse. Administrators present were Tom Forcella, Anne Keene, Michael Biddle, Nancy Bishop, and Pat Brett. Also present were Business Manager Andy Potochney, and Accounting Manager Linda Trudeau.

2. Public Forum for Topics on the Board Agenda Only

None

3. Continuation of the FY 2006-07 Budget Discussion

Chairman Bloss explained that the Board asked Dr. Forcella and Mr. Potochney to identify areas in the 2006-07 Budget that may be decreased.

Dr. Forcella explained that it was important, when considering potential savings, to keep the mission of the district and the Board's commitment to new programs in tact.

Dr. Forcella identified the following reductions totaling \$70,700: \$10,000 decrease in originally proposed increase for substitute pay; \$5,000 for electricity; \$15,700 annual payment to the Data Warehouse; \$15,000 for leaky steam traps; and \$25,000 for the Community Task Force on School Facilities (CTFSF) study.

Dr. Keene elaborated on Data Warehouse, explaining that the district pays for this service to store data for future analysis. The company is willing to keep our data for one year at no charge. Dr. Keene stated the district currently uses ctreports.com to make queries and analyze data. The district needs to determine if the storage and analysis services of Data Warehouse are still necessary.

Dr. Forcella explained that the \$15,000 for the steam traps can be included in the proposed bond for Leete. He also explained that the CTFSF has a balance in this year's Budget of \$40,000 and, when combined with the newly proposed \$25,000 in the 2006-07 Budget, should provide an adequate \$65,000 for Action Step 2 of the CTFSF recommended priorities.

Dr. Forcella summarized that the proposed Budget increase is 6.2%, a reduction from the January 9 proposed Budget increase of 6.74%. He reminded the Board that in the process of identifying areas of savings, \$200,000 had to be added to the Budget for medical benefits.

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Discussion ensued regarding medical benefits. Mr. Potochney explained that currently the district is self-funded and uses historical claims data to determine benefits expenses. Recent data reflected a significant increase in claims, therefore the Budget was increased \$200,000 to reflect the increase.

Mr. Potochney explained that currently the Town of Guilford, which includes the Board of Education, has a deficit of approximately \$1 million in the benefits fund.

Mr. Potochney explained that the district is currently reviewing proposals from insurance companies including both self-funded and fully-funded options.

Dr. Meyers stated that he would be in favor of a fully-funded insurance program that would allow the Board to accurately budget insurance costs based on expected premiums and not estimated claims. He expressed concern over continuing to make reductions in the district's and the town's insurance accounts and adding to the deficit.

Mr. Zuse questioned the impact of lowering the stop-loss number for an individual claim, currently at \$175,000. Currently the district is reinsured for the balance of any claims that exceed \$175,000. Mr. Zuse suggested that it might be reasonable to reduce the stop-loss number without incurring proportionally larger increases in reinsurance premiums. Mr. Potochney responded that this information will be analyzed in the new proposals being received from the insurance companies.

Chairman Bloss asked how the Guilford Public Schools 2006-07 Budget increase compares with other towns. Dr. Forcella, referencing a hand-out of proposed Budget increases by town, stated that the average among the 55 towns represented is 7.92% with a range of 2.63% to 12.38%. Guilford's original Budget increase was 6.74% and currently is proposed to be 6.2%, placing it below the state average.

Chairman Bloss asked Dr. Forcella to explain his decision to include World Language and an increase in professional development in this Budget over some of the other proposed initiatives identified in the Strategic Plan. Dr. Forcella responded that, based on the Strategic Plan and the district's mission, the goal is to be a high performing school district striving for excellence. These two initiatives will lead the district toward this goal. World Language in elementary school is proven to directly impact learning and changes and new programs must be supported by a culture that values professional development for teachers. Dr. Forcella added that he also wants to initiate reviews of existing programs to be sure they are aligned with the Strategic Plan and the mission for the district.

Dr. Forcella further explained that the importance of long range planning is to determine the appropriate timing to introduce more costly programs such as full-day Kindergarten.

4. Possible Action on the FY 2006-07 Budget

Upon a motion made by Dr. Meyers and seconded by Mrs. Dudley, the Board voted unanimously to act on the FY 2006-07 Budget.

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Mr. Bishop asked if the \$40,000 left in this year's Budget for the CTFSSF will be available for Action Step 2 of their study. He also suggested that a demographic study should be completed to provide more accurate projections to base decisions on building and staffing in the future. He expressed concern that reducing the CTFSSF Budget by \$25,000 will limit the Board's ability to complete the demographic study.

Chairman Bloss stated that the Board will have access to work from the Guilford Town Planner regarding historical data and new subdivision information. He added that the Board may still consider a demographic study and would either find the money in the Budget or request a modest amount from the Board of Finance.

Many Board members proceeded to express their support of the proposed 2006-07 Budget.

Dr. Meyers expressed his satisfaction with the proposed Budget. He reminded the public that 90% of the increases were due to contractual agreements and rising utility costs. The other increases are directly related to improving education for children, the mandate of the Board. He stated that the Board has been fiscally responsible.

Mrs. Dudley stated that she supports the proposed Budget, describing the increases as modest. She believes the Budget reflects the Board's pledge to improve education. She added that the administration has also identified areas of savings.

Mrs. Cartier expressed her appreciation to Mr. Potochney and the Board's finance committee for their work preparing the Budget. She thanked Dr. Forcella for listening to the Board and beginning to implement some of the new initiatives in this Budget.

Mr. Bishop stated that he wants the Budget to pass the first time and believes that many in the public support it. He referenced the list of budget increases in other towns and restated that fact that Guilford is in the lower 20% of the list.

Chairman Bloss stated that the Board's proposed Budget should not have a significant impact on taxes. He also mentioned the tax freeze that affects many senior citizens, noting that any Budget increase would not impact those protected by this plan. Chairman Bloss stated that this Budget, while modest, represents the most meaningful changes of any Budget he has been involved with since he has been serving on the Board.

Mrs. Nolan added her support for the Budget, agreeing with the comments of Chairman Bloss. She believes the inclusion of the new programs into the Budget will improve instruction for students. She added that this Budget process has been the most open and comprehensive she has been involved in since she began serving on the Board.

Dr. Iorio expressed his enthusiastic support for the Budget, stating that the changes made are thoughtful and prudent. He believes the Budget reflects the partnership between the community, the Board, and the administration. He expressed the importance of educating the community on the Budget.

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Ms. Migliacci stated that she also supports the Budget because it supports the mission of the district and the commitment to student achievement. She believes the increases are thoughtful and modest. She reiterated the importance of long range planning to implementing future new programs.

The Board voted unanimously on the pending motion to forward the Budget to the Board of Finance.

5. Discuss for Possible Action: Recommendation of the Community Task Force on School Facilities Report

Mrs. Cartier recommended tabling the CTFSF Report action until the February 13, 2006 meeting to allow the Board members more time to study it. It was the consensus of the Board to table the discussion and possible action until the February 13 regular meeting.

Mr. Zuse requested the documentation of the 2003 proposed Baldwin project to compare those estimates with the current proposal. Mr. Bishop directed him to the documents at Central Office North.

Dr. Meyers stated that he will not be available for the February 13 meeting. He voiced his support for many of the initiatives proposed in the CTFSF report and stated his appreciation for the outstanding work done by the CTFSF.

Mr. Zuse suggested that the Board consider reviewing the process of developing and proposing projects before sending them to referendum. He stated that the Board may be able to provide more accurate information to the public on actual costs if bids on projects were received prior to sending the proposals to referendum. Discussion continued regarding the feasibility of this process.

Mr. Potocheny offered to examine a few scenarios and develop a better understanding of the process. He also said that he would speak with Jim Saisa about State requirements on bidding procedures for school districts.

Mr. Bishop asked for public input to prioritize some of the proposed projects from the CTFSF.

Upon a motion made by Dr. Meyers and seconded by Mrs. Cartier, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn at 8:49 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Lorri L. Hahn
Clerk to the Board of Education