

**GUILFORD BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING  
TUESDAY, JANUARY 29, 2008  
ADAMS MIDDLE SCHOOL CHORUS ROOM, GUILFORD, CT**

**1. Call to Order**

Chairperson Bill Bloss called the meeting to order at 7:37 p.m. Board members present were Bill Bloss, Lou Iorio, Alan Meyers, Ted Zuse, Keith Bishop, Barbara Dudley, Mary Beeman, Linda Sanacora and Kathleen Nolan.

Administrators present were, Anne Keene, and Tom Forcella. Also present was Accounting Manager Linda Trudeau, Business Administrator Andy Potochney and Director of Operations Clifford Gurnham.

**2. Public Forum for Input on the FY 2008-2009 Budget**

Chairman Bloss reminded the public of the key dates remaining in the Budget process: February 4, 7:30 at GHS the Board will vote to approve the Budget to send to the Board of Finance; February 14, 7:30 at the Community Center the Board of Finance will receive the BOE Budget; March 4, 7:30 p.m. at the Community Center the BOF will hold a public hearing on the Budget; March 10 and 12, 7:30 p.m. at the Community Center the BOF will hold Budget Workshops; April 1, 7:30 p.m. at the Community Center the Town will hold its Annual Budget Meeting and April 8 will be the Budget Referendum.

Doug Newman addressed the Board on the topics of busing, recess at Baldwin, study halls at Baldwin, reading and Professional Learning Communities. Mr. Newman suggested that 20% of the students in our district do not ride the buses to and from school. He suggested, as a cost saving measure, that parents of students not using the buses sign a contract to “opt out” of using the buses.

Mr. Newman spoke in support of recess at Baldwin and suggested that the Board look into putting playground equipment on the grounds. He suggested that 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade students do not need study halls and that they should be eliminated.

Mr. Newman stated that the district should implement a sensory and research-based phonetic reading program. He noted that it is unacceptable for Guilford to have less than 95% of its students able to read.

Mr. Newman stated that he hoped that Professional Learning Communities are not being used as a panacea for professional development.

Jay Carlson spoke to the Board about incorporating sign language into the curriculum so that non-verbal students can communicate with their peers and teachers. She spoke about the importance and value of sign language to all students including making learning to read easier. She noted that Baldwin currently has an after-school sign language club that

has become very popular. She stated that it is important to integrate sign language in the elementary schools.

Bo Huhn requested that the Board add a substance abuse counselor at the high school one day each week. He noted that he also requested that the Town add this same service at Guilford Youth and Family Services. Mr. Huhn noted his personal experience with a child with addiction and stated that there are many children in Guilford struggling with similar problems. He explained the importance of prevention and added that the problem does not only affect the substance abuser but also the educational process. Mr. Huhn showed the Board a chart depicting the progression of substance abuse among high school students in Madison, noting that he believes that the data in Guilford is very similar. He noted that 23% of seniors in Madison are using drugs and alcohol and that some are already alcoholics and addicts.

Terry Corning read a letter written by Sarah Reed, a member of the GPTA. Ms. Reed noted that the proposed Budget reflects a doubling of legal fees, suggesting an increase in litigation from special education parents whose children's needs are not being met. Ms. Reed wrote that she believes it would be better to allocate more money to special education staff and services instead of increasing the budget for legal fees.

Chairman Bloss noted that the legal services line item includes other fees including expenses incurred for contract negotiations.

Marlene Valasca requested that the Board and the Administration take a more proactive approach to special education. She noted that the program needs more support services including physical and occupational therapy, speech and language pathology, and sign language to potentially reduce the amount of out-placed students in the district. She suggested that there should be an increase in the number of special education teachers and para educators in the district as well as instructional materials. She urged the Board to focus on long-term results by allocating money now to the program.

Maureen Belden read a letter from Michelle Guerra, the parent of an autistic child at Melissa Jones. She acknowledged the exceptional teachers and support staff that work with her son. She expressed concern that there is not a five-year plan in place for special education and that there has been a reduction of special education services over the summer to meet the needs of an extended year program. She suggested that a committee be formed to develop programs to address specific needs including autism.

Sarah Kellogg expressed concern about the challenges and obstacles that friends and peers are facing regarding special education in Guilford. She noted that many parents of children with special needs are concerned that there has been a "shift" in the last few years resulting in fewer services granted and an increase in developmental delays and parent dissatisfaction. Mrs. Kellogg stated that this "shift" has resulted in more outplacements and an increase in legal fees. She suggested that the district needs concrete program solutions now to enable more special needs students to be mainstreamed.

Dee Jacobs addressed the Board regarding zero-based budgeting. She stated that this approach does not always get you where you need to be. She suggested that zero-based budgeting is incremental and that it may be difficult to achieve the vision of the district using this approach. Mrs. Jacobs also talked about the importance of team sports and other opportunities for physical activities beyond traditional physical education. She noted that the district should start with a vision for each program, determine the overall costs and then decide how to fund the initiative.

Claire Murdoch asked the Board why “everyday” costs such as travel and professional development have not increased. She suggested that it is harder to understand budget to budget comparisons versus budget to actual expenditures. She asked if the site improvements proposed in the 2008-09 Budget are independent of any proposal coming forth from the Community Task Force on School Facilities. Chairman Bloss confirmed that this is the case. She noted that the district is spending a lot on electricity and wanted to know if the district is considering energy conservation measures.

Chairman Bloss noted that renovation work being considered at GHS and Adams would require conservation measures required by the State.

Diana Colcord addressed the Board regarding busing, study halls at Baldwin, tech. ed. at Adams and the number of business teachers at GHS. Mrs. Colcord suggested that Guilford share buses with neighboring towns to transport special education students, thus reducing transportation costs. She stated that there should be option for kids regarding study halls at Baldwin. She suggested that an additional academic could be offered to those students who do not need a study hall. Mrs. Colcord also suggested that a computer course be offered in place of a tech ed course at Adams. She also noted that there are five tech ed teachers at GHS and one business teacher. Mrs. Colcord suggested that this is disproportionate and that these programs should be reviewed.

Doug Newman stated that he believes the DARE program might be eliminated and suggested that the program does not work. Dr. Forcella noted that the DARE program is not funded by GPS, but through Guilford Youth and Family Services. Mr. Newman also asked the Board not to forget about TAG programs for students. Mr. Newman suggested that there should be a community task force that meets year-round to craft budgets, analyze spending and work on the district’s finances. He also suggested that the district’s check register be put on line.

Chairman Bloss noted that there has been a significant increase over the past few years in the detail of financial information that the Board and the public receive from the district’s business office including hard copies and electronic versions of the complete budgets posted on the district’s website.

Dr. Meyers noted that the Board of Education presents a financial report and the check register each month to the Board of Finance.

The Board engaged in conversation about substance abuse prevention and Mr. Huhn's request for additional support in this area at GHS. Dr. Forcella noted the importance of this service. He stated that this year the district has increased social work services at the elementary level to focus on early intervention.

The Board took a recess from 9 to 9:10 p.m.

Chairman Bloss noted that the proposed 2008-09 Budget represents a 7.43% increase over this year. He asked Mr. Potochney and Dr. Forcella if there are any areas of the Budget that may be adjusted since the original draft was created in early January.

Mr. Potochney noted a potential savings in medical benefits of \$326,000 based on projections provide by Anthem in an early January meeting.

Dr. Forcella noted that special education transportation will need to be increased based on projected needs for 2008-09.

Dr. Forcella noted that there has been a .2 (FTE) increase proposed in speech and language pathology at the pre-school level.

Dr. Meyers stated that, based on the current state of the economy, he believes that a 7.43% increase is too high, particularly when considering potential facilities projects in the future. He does not want to jeopardize potential improvements at GHS and Adams by presenting a budget increase that is perceived as too high. He suggested that there need to be some reductions made to the current proposal.

Chairman Bloss asked if it is necessary to hire a new technician for next year. He also asked the Board if they would like to consider changing the five-year technology plan to a six-year plan in an effort to save money.

Mrs. Beeman stated that she would hesitate to delay any technology plans as this action would place our district even further behind in this area.

Mr. Bishop suggested that he would need to see a cost-benefit analysis to understand if expanding the length of time to implement the technology plan would make sense.

Chairman Bloss asked if the \$75,000 budgeted for architectural fees for the Community Task Force on School Facilities will be needed in 2008-09, as the majority of the work has already been done.

Mr. Potochney suggested that there are prior encumbrances from the architects and that the funds need to be available to address these expenses as well as future expenses.

Chairman Bloss asked about the urgency of installing a new phone system at Baldwin for \$60,000. Dr. Forcella noted that this has been a request for the past few years.

Mr. Zuse noted that Guilford spends \$300 to \$600 less per student than other districts in our DRG. He suggested that before reductions are discussed, the Board should decide if they are comfortable with the current level of spending.

Dr. Iorio stated that the Board must consider the level of increase that the Town and the Community will accept while also insuring that the amount budgeted will meet the goals of the district and the needs of all children. He stated his belief that the Budget will be supported by the community, even if it is ultimately a larger-than-average increase, if it is clear that the amount proposed is the amount needed to meet all goals and needs.

Mr. Zuse asked how long the Board can responsibly defer work on facilities that is needed to provide safe and appropriate environments for students.

Dr. Iorio suggested that it is time for the Board to act on the existing options that will be presented by the CTFSF and not request additional options.

Mrs. Beeman noted that this proposed Budget has been developed based on need.

Mrs. Dudley noted that the teachers developed their individual requests based on exactly what they need for next year. She stated that, due to the current freeze in spending, some materials and program needs are not being met this year and she urged the Board to be cautious when considering any reductions to the proposed Budget.

Dr. Meyers noted that the Board does not intend to reduce any areas of the Budget that effect the priorities identified including world language, technology, special education and other programs directly effecting instruction. He suggested that the Board needs to look critically at other areas of the Budget to identify possible cuts.

Mr. Bishop expressed concern about making large reductions to non-program areas of the Budget, particularly related to facilities, as providing appropriate and safe facilities is a part of the Board's charge.

In response to a question from Mr. Zuse, Dr. Forcella noted that average proposed increases among other CT towns to date is 6.5%.

Dr. Forcella stated that he and Mr. Potochney will reexamine the Budget to identify possible savings and will provide a list to the Board.

Chairman Bloss noted that the median tax bill in the Town of Guilford is approximately \$5,000. He noted that a 5% increase to the Budget would translate to an approximate \$250 increase in individual taxes. He further noted that the difference between a 5, 6 or 7% increase is approximately \$50 at each level.

Mr. Zuse suggested that the Board does have the option to recommend the bonding of certain capital projects.

Mr. Bishop suggested that he believes there will be time to submit or revise bonding requests to the Board of Finance following the February 27 CTFSF presentation to the Board on potential options to address facility needs at GHS and Adams.

Mr. Zuse asked that the Board strongly consider securing the funding for an HVAC system at Adams, noting that once the funding is approved there is still a significant period of time before the project would be initiated. If, in the meantime, a more expansive project were approved for Adams there would be ample time to combine the HVAC project into the larger project.

Mr. Bishop expressed concern over the proposed 6% increase for buses. He noted that the district will be requesting bids for bus service and if potential vendors see the proposed increase their bids will be developed based on our projections.

Chairman Bloss asked that the Board members circulate any comments and questions on the Budget via email prior to the February 4 special meeting to approve the Budget.

Upon a motion made by Mrs. Beeman and seconded by Mrs. Dudley, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn at 10:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by:

Lorri Hahn  
Clerk to the Board of Education