

The Board of Education Town of Vernon

Anne Fischer, Chairperson
Dean Houle, Vice Chairperson
Vicky Rispoli, Secretary
George Apel, Treasurer
Laura Bush
David Kemp
Susan Norlie-Hesnan
Kyle Percy
Paul Stansel

30 Park Street – PO Box 600
Vernon, Connecticut 06066

January 19, 2010

BOARD OF EDUCATION BUDGET WORKSHOP

A Vernon Board of Education budget workshop was held at the Administration Building on Tuesday, January 19, 2010.

Chairperson Fischer called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. Present when the meeting was called to order were Mr. Apel, Mrs. Bush, Mr. Houle, Mr. Kemp, Mrs. Norlie-Hesnan, Mr. Percy, Mrs. Rispoli, and Mr. Stansel. Also present were Mrs. Murasso and Mr. Paskiewicz.

Mrs. Rispoli informed the Board of a valuable workshop she attended at the CAFE conference. The workshop focused on how to present a positive budget to the community during hard economic times. Mrs. Rispoli distributed and read a list of the positive aspects/accomplishments of the Vernon Schools throughout the years that all should be proud of:

- No teachers were let go from their positions
- Early Childhood Education, Head Start, and free and reduced meals to young children
- We offer half day and extended day kindergarten at all schools
- Extensive Adult and Continuing Education courses
- Strong Special Education support services
- Do not charge students, pay to play for sports
- Lower class sizes than most schools
- College credit courses
- Variety of advanced placement courses
- Agricultural Education program and facility
- School to career partnerships
- After school activities such as: sports, band, chorus, drama, dance, robotics to name a few
- New high school auditorium
- Newly renovated school buildings
- Safety and communication improvements
- Improved parking
- Exterior and interior remodeling
- We have up to date athletic fields and facilities supporting school and town-wide activities
- Excellent playscapes

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Mrs. Rispoli suggested that if the Board projects a positive attitude, the community will support the budget.

Mr. Karasinski joined the meeting at 7:05 p.m.

2010-2011 Proposed Budget

Mr. Paskiewicz provided an overview of the Superintendent's Proposed Budget for the 2010-2011 Academic Year. The total proposed operating budget is \$48,295,915, an increase of \$2,459,915 over the appropriated amount for the current year (2009-2010) of \$45,835,932, or an increase of 5.37%. In addition, the need exists to budget an additional amount of \$52,000 in order that the district comply with a new state mandate to implement internal suspension programs in all schools. Finally, it is estimated that the district will save an additional amount of approximately (\$60,000) through hiring to replace any teachers who might leave during the summer of 2010 prior to the start of the next school year. This nets to a total requested increase of \$2,451,915, or 5.35% over the current year.

Mr. Paskiewicz commented on the difficulty he is having with the size of the year over year budget increase in light of the current economic environment but noted that the increase is simply due to contractual salary/benefit obligations and medical insurance increases.

Sources of the year over year increase to the operational budget are as follows:

Salaries	\$829,940
Fringe Benefits	\$1,708,755
Utilities	\$28,849
Operations	(\$107,630)

Mr. Paskiewicz explained that the building principals and administrators were instructed to budget for a \$0 increase or less year over year (excluding salaries and benefits). Additionally, RHS and VCMS administrators were instructed to allocate the funds as they saw fit. However, the budget for the five elementary schools reflects adjustments in order to achieve equal per pupil spending among the schools. The overall proposed budget for the five elementary schools

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(excluding salaries and benefits) is less than the current year, but expenses for two schools actually increased (CRS and MSS) while three schools decreased (NES, SRS, and LSS).

Mr. Paskiewicz provided details of the various sections of the budget book; including, the question/answer section and the salary/FTE reports. He also noted that the budget reflects a total of nine teacher retirements. The retiring teachers' salaries were replaced with lower budgeted salaries. Mr. Paskiewicz explained that the district really saves little money in the first year post retirement unless the district elects to not fill the position(s).

Mr. Apel and Mr. Kemp noted that the totals of the line item detail reports do not reconcile to the overall summary report. Additionally, the dollar change over the approved 2009-10 budget reflected on the Education Appropriations Summary does not reconcile to the 'Sources of 2010-2011 Budget Increase' chart. The Board asked Administration to research the variances.

Mr. Stansel thanked the Interim Superintendent for the details provided in the budget message and noted that the projections were very helpful.

Mr. Apel moved that the Board of Education authorize the Superintendent to contact the bargaining units of the teachers and administrators to open their contracts. The motion was seconded by Mr. Houle. Mr. Apel explained that the purpose of the motion is to request a sit-down with the bargaining units in order to look at the contracts and potentially reduce the impact on the 2010-11 budget year. The motion was voted on and passed with Mrs. Norlie-Hesnan voting no.

Mrs. Fischer commended all the principals on their efforts to keep the operating budget to a 0% increase.

The elementary school principals were asked to come forward to address any questions from the Board regarding their budget requests. Board members asked for clarification on a number of line items; including:

- The allocation of budgeted funds for the preschool program to reflect the disbursement of the program to all five elementary schools.
- The number of reading consultants at SRS.
- Why the salary for a reading teacher was not budgeted in 2009-2010 for NES.

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- The increase in budgeted funds for special education personnel for LSS.

The Vernon BOE Class Size Policy was discussed and Mr. Paskiewicz noted that the two options for elementary class size reflected in the budget message are a starting point and are subject to change.

Mr. Houle asked the elementary principals to comment on the impact the budget freeze has had on the current school year and the 2010-2011 budget. SRS Principal Matt Wlodarczyk noted that the freeze has had a significant impact on technology in the schools. It has been very difficult to replace the old, antiquated computers at the schools. He also felt that the schools are not moving forward since administrators have been forced to beg and plead to get essentials. Additionally, Mr. Wlodarczyk noted that networking remains an issue as infrastructure improvements have been slow. Mr. Paskiewicz commented that historically Vernon has utilized the funds from the Open Choice program for technology but last year the Board voted to allocate the Choice funds to Magnet School Tuition.

NES Interim Principal Michael DeBellis noted that the portable computer lab at NES is working well. The computers are being utilized and the teachers have been happy with the schedule.

Mrs. Fischer inquired about the number of Smart Boards in each elementary school:

Lake Street School	2
Maple Street School	5
Center Road School	1
Skinner Road School	4
Northeast School	0

At 7:55 p.m., the meeting broke for recess.

The meeting resumed at 8:03 p.m.

Mr. Kemp noted that the overall budget increase of 5.35% will not be accepted by the Town Council or taxpayers. Mr. Kemp moved to request Administration to reduce the total salary and benefit accounts by a total of \$1.5 million by February 1, 2010. The motion was seconded by Mr. Apel. Mr. Kemp explained that the purpose of the motion is to have staff come back to the

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Board with their expertise and recommendations for budget reductions. Reducing the proposed budget by \$1.5 million would bring the year over year increase to 2.2%.

Mrs. Norlie-Hesnan commented that she cannot support the reduction without having details of the impact on class size, staffing, and the children of Vernon. She would need to understand the implications of the reduction.

Mr. Houle agreed with Mr. Kemp that it makes sense to send the budget back to Administration to make recommendation for budget cuts. The Board needs a concrete understanding of the impact of any reductions prior to sending the budget to the Town Council on February 10, 2010.

Mr. Stansel agreed with Mrs. Norlie-Hesnan that he cannot agree with a blanket reduction without understanding the impact on the schools and class size. He noted that the budget for the current school year has been in a freeze since the fall, the new operating budget reflects a 0% increase in non-contractual related accounts and at some point the Board must present a case to voters that if they value the school system, they must support budget increases.

Mr. Apel commented that the purpose of Mr. Kemp's motion is to have Administration go back to investigate the best way to reduce the accounts by \$1.5 million. Administration has the insight the Board needs to be able to substantiate and defend a budget to the Town Council and taxpayers.

Based on the comments of various Board members noted above, Mr. Kemp revised his motion as follows: Mr. Kemp moved that the Board of Education direct the Superintendent to return to the Board by February 1, 2010 with the impact of a \$1.5 million reduction for Board consideration. The revised motion was seconded by Mr. Apel and passed unanimously.

Mr. Houle moved to amend Mr. Apel's earlier motion that the Board of Education authorize the Superintendent to contact the bargaining units of the teachers and administrators to open their contracts. The amendment requests a response from the unions by January 31, 2010. The motion was seconded by Mr. Stansel and passed with Mrs. Norlie-Hesnan abstaining.

Mr. Fischer noted that the next BOE budget workshop will be held on Thursday, January 28, 2010.

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Mr. Karasinski commented that the fringe benefits account is very fluid. The rates are based on losses and change frequently.

Mrs. Norlie-Hesnan moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:39 p.m. The motion was seconded by Mrs. Bush and passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Secretary