

# 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

February 1, 2010

## BOARD OF EDUCATION BUDGET WORKSHOP

A Vernon Board of Education budget workshop was held at the Administration Building on Monday, February 1, 2010.

Chairperson Fischer called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m. Present when the meeting was called to order were Mr. Apel, Mrs. Bush, Mr. Houle, Mr. Kemp, Mr. Percy, Mrs. Rispoli, and Mr. Stansel. Also present were Mrs. Murasso and Mr. Paskiewicz.

Mr. Paskiewicz opened the meeting by distributing a chart detailing the sources of the 2010-2011 budget increase. The chart identified the following sources of the year over year increases to the operational budget:

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

Mr. Paskiewicz explained that the budget increase is driven by two factors: the increase in medical insurance benefits and contractual salary obligations. The BOE budget for operations already reflects a year over year reduction. Essentially there is \$2.5 million in expenses that the Board has no control over. He noted the importance of Vernon continuing to remain competitive in order to recruit talented people for open positions.

Mrs. Norlie-Hesnan joined the meeting at 7:08 p.m.

Mr. Paskiewicz continued by distributing a second handout which provided a snapshot of per pupil spending for the Vernon Public Schools over the past 10 plus years based on figures calculated by the State Department of Education - Net Current Expenditure per Pupil (NCEP). He noted that for Vernon, even though per pupil spending has increased over the years, the difference between what Vernon spends in comparison to the State average has steadily increased from 2002 through 2008. This equates to Vernon under-spending the average for the State by \$1 million for the 2008-2009 school year.

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At the January 19, 2010 BOE Budget Workshop, Administration was instructed to provide the Board with the impact of a \$1.5 million decrease in the 2010-2011 proposed budget. Mr. Paskiewicz noted that Administration has prepared three reduction scenarios:

- Part One: Reduce \$1,500,000 in Salaries and Benefits
- Part Two: Additional Possible Reductions
- Part Three: Budget ‘Adjustments’ Since Original Estimates were Calculated

Mr. Paskiewicz strongly stressed that Administration does not recommended any reductions and believes they will not be good for the Vernon Schools.

Mr. Kemp clarified that the current proposed 2010-2011 budget stands at a 5.37% year over year increase. A reduction of \$1.5 million will bring the year over year increase to 2.2% which is still a substantial increase. He noted that the Board is not looking to bring the year over year change to 0%.

## PART ONE – REDUCE \$1,500,000 IN SALARIES AND BENEFITS

<u>Initiative</u>	<u>2010-2011 Budget Reduction</u>
Eliminate seven grade 1-5 teaching positions	(\$394,571)
Reorganize Administrative team	(\$129,000)
Eliminate three secretary locations	(\$108,000)
Eliminate custodial position	(\$45,000)
Business/Maintenance office	(\$46,000)
Library Staffing – reduce by 20%	(\$25,000)
District-wide reduction in paraprofessionals	(\$100,000)
Eliminate elementary instrumental music teacher	(\$45,653)
Combine one VCMS team (grades 7 and 8) and do not fill LA & Science retirements	(\$121,306)
Eliminate VCMS social studies teacher	(\$45,653)
Eliminate VCMS world language teacher	(\$45,653)
Eliminate VCMS ESL teacher (retirement)	(\$22,941)
Eliminate VCMS School to Career facilitator	(\$18,500)
Eliminate VCMS math teacher	(\$45,653)
Eliminate VCMS special education teacher	(\$45,653)

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Eliminate co-curricular sports at VCMS	(\$31,934)
Eliminate RHS business education teacher	(\$45,653)
Eliminate RHS science teacher (retirement)	(\$61,192)
Eliminate RHS health and PE teacher	(\$40,653)
Eliminate RHS language arts teacher	(\$40,653)
Eliminate .40 social worker	(\$16,261)
Eliminate .40 world language teacher	(\$16,261)
Freshman girls basketball program	(\$6,993)
Various assistant coach positions	(\$15,487)
JV boys volleyball	(\$3,994)
Various other reductions	(\$8,869)
 TOTAL PART ONE	 (\$1,526,533)

## PART TWO – ADDITIONAL POSSIBLE REDUCTIONS

<u>Initiative</u>	<u>2010-2011 Budget Reduction</u>
Eliminate new textbook adoption	(\$121,013)
Technology reductions	(\$19,443)
Reduce substitute teachers' account	(\$50,000)
 TOTAL PART TWO	 (\$190,456)

## PART THREE – BUDGET 'ADJUSTMENTS' SINCE ORIGINAL ESTIMATES

<u>Initiative</u>	<u>2010-2011 Budget Reduction</u>
Increase in funding for 'early retirement'	\$60,000
Prescription coverage reduction	(\$74,000)
Dental reduction due to lower rates for 2010/2011	(\$20,000)
Budget for magnet school tuition	\$100,000
 TOTAL PART THREE	 (\$66,000)

GRAND TOTAL OF POSSIBLE REDUCTIONS	(\$1,650,989)
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Mr. Paskiewicz also distributed a handout detailing the 2010-2011 “Bump-Up” Projected Enrollment and class size options for each elementary school and grade. He noted that the spreadsheet assumes that the 2010-2011 kindergarten class will be the same size as the 2009-2010 class, all students will advance one grade, and all students will age one year.

Board members discussed the budgeted amount for replacements of retiring staff, the option of eliminating or reducing ‘other than classroom’ teachers, the option of creating part-time positions, and the impact of magnet school tuition. Mrs. Norlie-Hesnan voiced her concern that the magnet schools are undermining the ability to provide adequate services for public school children.

## Community Forum

Ms. Linda Hahn, Music Department Chair, addressed the Board regarding the potential elimination of the grade 5 instrumental music program. She noted that by eliminating the one teaching position, the Board will eliminate a program. Additionally, it is the only program possibly being eliminated and stressed that it is the foundation of Vernon’s instrumental music program.

A total of 150 fifth grade students currently participate in the program with only one teacher servicing all the students. Ms. Hahn stated that if the program is cut, instrumental music will need to begin in grade six. The average grade for the start of instrumental music for the State of Connecticut is fourth grade.

Ms. Hahn noted the accomplishments of the RHS Marching Band and indicated that elimination of the 5<sup>th</sup> grade program would impact the programs and VCMS and RHS. She concluded by stating that the Board would not cut the reading program in kindergarten and hoped they would continue to support the foundation of Vernon’s program by continuing to offer instrumental music in 5<sup>th</sup> grade.

Mrs. Phyllis Winkler, 20 Gottier Drive, addressed the Board regarding the potential for the elimination of elementary teaching positions resulting in larger class sizes. She stressed the importance of providing a solid foundation for students in grades K, 1, and 2. Mrs. Winkler noted that a solid foundation will give students the best chance to be lifelong learners.

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Mrs. Winkler also stressed the importance of paraprofessional positions in the classrooms to support the new elementary reading and math programs. The paraprofessionals and reasonable class sizes offer the opportunity to teach students at their individual level.

Mrs. Winkler urged the Board to give students at least an adequate education and not to do the job of the Mayor or Town Council. She wondered why the Board needed to make cuts when budgeted operating expenses are decreasing year over year and hoped the Board would support the students by not making any additional reductions.

Mrs. Shireen Rhoades, 30 Olive Lane, a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher in Somers and Vernon parent addressed the Board regarding her concern about the potential for larger class sizes. She noted that some classes could go from 17 children to 27 children, a level that exceeds the BOE class size policy. Mrs. Rhoades commented that the large class sizes may make her want to look at the Magnet Schools and neighboring Towns as an alternative.

Mrs. Fischer stressed to all in attendance that the Board has not yet made any cuts to the proposed 2010-2011 budget.

Ms. Catherine Earley, VEA President, addressed the Board in support of the comments of Mrs. Winkler. She asked the Board to carefully consider class size in early elementary and noted the potential impact larger elementary class sizes will have on the middle school. The results of larger elementary class sizes may cause children to not achieve the skills they need to be successful at the middle school level. They may have more difficulty and struggle with decoding and fluency.

## 2010-2011 Proposed Budget Review

Mr. Apel thanked Mr. Paskiewicz and Administration for preparing the information requested by the Board. He suggested that the Board take time to study the spreadsheets in order to contemplate any potential action. A lot of information was presented this evening and it is too important to attempt to take action at this time. Mr. Apel also noted that this exercise was necessary as the Board has no idea what the ECS grant funds will be from the State. Additionally, Mr. Apel believes the Board has a fiduciary responsibility to review the budget in detail and submit a fiscally responsible budget to the Town.

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Mr. Stansel agreed with Mr. Apel that Board members need time to digest the information proposed and present any concerns or suggestions at the next BOE Budget Workshop.

Mrs. Fischer asked if any Board members had questions for the school principals or administrators. Mr. Apel asked for additional details of the following accounts:

- 51123: Salary Non-Affiliated in the Superintendent's Office
- 51151: Overall, the budget for paraprofessionals is increasing year over year by 9.46%. Mr. Apel asked for details of the special education programs the paraprofessionals will support and details of the offset in out of district placements.
- Mr. Apel inquired whether the appropriate amount was being budgeted for the new Superintendent's salary.

Mrs. Bush requested details of the case loads for each special education teacher or resource classroom to ensure resources are being allocated appropriately. Patti Buell, Director of Pupil Personnel, responded that the special education resources are continuously monitored and adjusted.

Mrs. Bush also requested details of the case loads for the remedial reading teachers to ensure resources are allocated as needed.

Mr. Kemp suggested that it may be time to revisit the topic of the allocation of elementary grades in Vernon – what grades should be in what building. This topic was previously explored in June of 2006 and may help keep class size under control. He noted the potential benefits of the reallocation of grades could be better collaboration of staff and resources.

Mr. Paskiewicz discussed the topic of clustering grades and noted that even though it may smooth out class sizes, it will also create more transitions for the children and will have a significant impact on transportation costs.

Mrs. Norlie-Hesnan noted that what Mr. Kemp is proposing is not doable for the upcoming school year as there are too many underlying issues that would need to be resolved. She stressed her concern about the potential for large class sizes and the associated impact on the children of Vernon. Mrs. Norlie-Hesnan indicated her desire to send the budget to the Town as is.

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Mr. Paskiewicz once again stressed the fact that Administration has presented proposed reductions that they believe would have the least overall impact on the students. However, implementation would be a tremendous challenge. He also noted the following overall budget challenges facing Vernon Schools:

- Enrollment is very difficult to project due to the transient nature of the population.
- The budget will be impacted by increasing magnet school tuitions.
- Vernon must continue to comply with the requirements of No Child Left Behind.

Mrs. Fischer thanked Administration for all the information provided and thanked the members of the community for coming to the meeting. She noted that the next BOE Budget Workshop is scheduled for Wednesday, February 3<sup>rd</sup> at 7:00.

Mr. Houle moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:42 p.m. The motion was seconded by Mrs. Norlie-Hesnan and passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Secretary