



Special Meeting- Budget Workshop
Avon Board of Education
34 Simsbury Road, Avon, Connecticut

Mission Statement

Our mission is to inspire in each student a joy and passion for learning and a commitment to excellence, personal integrity, and social responsibility.

Tuesday, December 19, 2023, 6:00 pm

Avon High School, Community Room

Avon High School
510 West Avon Road
Avon, CT 06001

Minutes

Attendance

Board Members Present: Jackie Blea; Debra Chute, Board Chair; Jeffrey S. Fleischman, Board Secretary; Lynn Katz; Nicole Russo; Thej Singh, Vice-Chair; Laura Young;

Board Members Absent: Sarah Thompson

Administration Present: Dr. Bridget Heston Carnemolla, Superintendent of Schools; Roberto Medic, Assistant Superintendent; Jess Giannini, Assistant Superintendent; Susan Russo, Business Manager

- I. Call to order Chair Ms. Deb Chute called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.
- II. Pledge of Allegiance
- III. Communication from Public - There were no comments from the public
- IV. Discussion regarding Proposed 2024-2025 Budget

At this time, Board Chair Chute turned the meeting over to Dr. Carnemolla to discuss the 24-25 budget.

Dr. Carnemolla stated that this was the first budget workshop for the 24-25 school year, right now we look at the bigger picture, the narrative of the budget and how to set the course to move forward. All Administration has been working diligently on the budget. The development of the budget, as always, is done in line with the Avon Blueprint.

 - **Focus Area I:** Student Learning - We will create multiple student learning pathways to challenge students to think critically, persist in solving challenging problems, work collaboratively, and communicate effectively.
 - Maintain the 1.0 Preschool teacher - This is necessary as the number of 3-5 year olds has increased exponentially, as well as the new law that students need to be the age of 5 on/before September 1, will keep more students in the preschool classrooms.
Ms. Katz asked if the law is steadfast, if the student isn't 5 years old they can't go to Kindergarten? Dr. Carnemolla answered that no, there is a process of assessment if the parent feels the child is ready to move on.

- Teaching Assistants - Maintain the 8.0 FTE Teaching Assistants. We need more hands in the Kindergarten classrooms, as the number of students is always increasing, and also the Special Education needs do follow the child into Kindergarten from Preschool. Teacher Assistants are also used to substitute/cover for teachers and this promotes consistency with the children. The amount of TA's is equivalent to 6.0 FTE, although it may be more than 6 teachers, with the FTE's split up.
- Paraeducators - Maintain additional 7.0 FTE paraeducators to support IEP/1:1/preschool needs.
- Out of District Tuition Requirements - We pay tuition any time it is determined that we can not meet the needs of the students (despite best efforts), or if it is determined that it is just best for the student. Also paying for residential placements, which can be very costly. The escrow account is used as much as we can
- Magnet Schools- Avon is responsible for tuition for the Magnet school students.
- SPED- New legislation says we are responsible for SPED students to the age of 22, previously it was 21. This does affect our bottom line since it is another year of costs for the student. Dr. Carnemolla also commented that our SPED population has grown considerably over the past 3 years.
- **Focus Area II: Personal Growth and Relationships** - Foster a safe learning community that empowers students to be self-directed, self-regulated, and resilient as they strive to advance their own personal and academic goals.
 - District-Wide School Psychologist - Maintain additional 1.0 FTE District-Wide Psychologist. This past year this was funded by ARPA ESSER Grant funds, so it now will be something that has to go into the budget for next year. This position assists in performing evaluations, testing and additional support.
 - Social Worker- Additional social worker needed, particularly at PGS, due to increased Social and Emotional needs. Dr. Carnemolla would rather not split one social worker between the schools, rather one for each school, but right now PGS has the greater need with the greater number of students in the school. A short discussion ensued regarding the need for Social Workers, what part they play in our schools and the extensive list of duties that keep getting added to their days.

Ms. Singh asked if there was a social worker at each school and Dr. Carnemolla replied there is one in each building for K-8, and there are 2 social workers at the High School.

Ms. Nicole Russo asked to clarify also the number of Guidance Counselors at the schools to which Dr. Carnemolla answered that there was 1 at Thompson Brook, 2 at AMS and 6 at the high school.

Ms. Singh asked why we need a social worker and not a counselor and Dr. Carnemolla said that the IEP's and the needs of the students require the expertise and certification of a social worker.
- **Focus Area III: Communication and Partnerships** - Build internal and external partnerships in service to the district's mission and beliefs for student learning through clear communication and transparent process.
 - Unified Sports - Working to grow this program.
- **Focus Area IV: Systems** - Maximize efficiencies and optimize resources through the ongoing creating, refinement, and alignment of processes, procedures, and systems.
 - Health Insurance - the increase is costlier than predicted. Mr. Fleischman asked if it was time to shop around for Health Insurance, Ms. Susan Russo answered that this is a continuation of funding our own insurance, and this is all based on the claims and prescription prices that are exorbitantly high. Ms. Chute asked Ms. Russo to explain to those

present that being self insured is more cost efficient, Ms. Russo clarified that Cigna as our claims administrator, we pay them a fee to process them, but we own the claims. We do cost comparisons every year, and it is a rule of thumb that if you have over 100 employees, it is better and more cost effective to be self insured.

- Pension and OPEB - This is a welcome decrease due to favorable investment results. After a short discussion, it was concluded that Health Insurance and Pension Benefits equate to approximately 1.5% of the total budget increase for next year.
- Transportation - An increased need for wheelchair transportation, and out of district transportation.
- Supplies and Equipment and Contracted Services - Time had run out to talk to this point, but Dr. Carnemolla summed up the Supplies/Equipment and Contracted Services: Contracted Services is up a little bit, a few things, no HVAC person so that has had to be contracted out, preventative maintenance, additional evaluations in Occupational Therapy, minimum wage has been increasing, necessary software renewals.

A short discussion took place regarding the total percent increase and the main drivers of the budget.

2024-2025 Preliminary Budget Summary

2023-2024 Adopted Gross Budget - \$66,743,808.95
Preliminary Proposed Budget 24-25 - \$71,552,739.56
Difference in Dollars 2023/2024 to 2024/2025 - \$4,808,930.61
Difference in Percent 23/24 to 24/25 - 7.21%

2024/2025 Initial Budget Reductions Summary

Preliminary Proposed Budget- \$71,552,739.56
Requested Additions Reductions - \$116,000.00
Other Reductions - (\$1,292,162.49)
FY 2024/2025 Working Preliminary Budget - \$70,376,577.07
Difference in Dollars 2023/2024 to 2024/2025 - \$3,728,843.12
Difference in Percent - 5.59%

V. Adjournment

At 7:02 p.m. Ms. Deb Chute moved to adjourn the meeting and Ms. Laura Young seconded the motion. The Motion Passed 7-0-0

Minutes prepared by Christine Sardinkas, Board Recording Secretary
Minutes respectfully submitted by Jeffrey S. Fleischman, Board Secretary

Board minutes are approved at the next regular monthly Board meeting, and any correction so the minutes, if needed, will be made at that time.