

**CITY OF NORWALK  
BOARD OF EDUCATION  
FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING  
JANUARY 11, 2012**

ATTENDANCE: Steve Colarossi, Chair; Rosa Murray.

STAFF: Dr. Susan Marks, Superintendent; Anthony Daddona, Assistant Superintendent; Elio Longo, Chief Financial Officer.

OTHER: Bruce Mellion, NFT

Call to Order

Mr. Colarossi called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m.

Review/Approval of Minutes: December 7, 2011

Mr. Colarossi stated that he had made changes to the draft of the minutes that were transcribed from the tape and that he would e-mail corrected minutes to the members for review. Approval of minutes was tabled until next meeting.

Discussion of Current Year 2011-2012 Budget

Mr. Longo reviewed the report as of December 31, 2011 and highlighted that there are some variances but that overall the total of 34.1% expended is in line with the time lapse indicator factor of four months into the school year. He added that he would like to add columns to this report on encumbrances to assist in arriving at more accurate projections for the year to date numbers.

Mr. Colarossi asked questions on the percentages expended in object codes 114, 117, 128 salaries, substitutes, and overtime. Mr. Longo provided explanations and the cost drivers and key indicators of the expenditures for the items. A discussion ensued on how to have a better management control over substitute costs. Dr. Marks stated that they are looking at incentives of substitute avoidance such as health and wellness programs. She added that she works closely with the principals to make sure they are coding the absences properly onto payroll.

Mr. Colarossi asked why this is not automated and Mr. Daddona replied that it is still a paper form process that requires his signature and that of the Instructional Specialists as well. He added that it is tedious and often times, data has to be extracted manually for grant information. Ms. Murray stated that there is no checks and balance system once the slips are sent to payroll and asked about the manual system that was to be automated by the relocation of payroll to the City's area.

Mr. Colarossi asked what overview needs to be done to make sure that coding is accurately done to classify and track the expenditures. Mr. Longo agreed to look into the City's time and attendance procedures and to see how our paper process can be improved.

Mr. Colarossi asked about the Longevity 235 and Certified Overtime, category 131 and Mr. Longo explained that the percentage expended for longevity is because it is paid upfront not in accordance with monthly payroll. Regarding certified overtime, Mr. Daddona replied that this could be extra coverage for teachers to do an extra period such as what occurs at Norwalk High or for coverage if substitutes were not available. Dr. Marks added that she has instructed H.R. to remove subs from list if they do not show or cancel too late to secure coverage.

Mr. Colarossi asked about the Object codes 510-511, Student Transportation Services and questioned the 65% and 96% expended. Mr. Longo replied that there is a significant discount for pre-payment built into the contract. Mr. Colarossi asked about the premium for Insurance for Interscholastic Activities. Mr. Longo replied that based upon his Danbury experience this is very high, and he would like to look into a renegotiated plan for next year that would significantly lower this premium. Mr. Colarossi asked about the claims history and that central office was not submitting claims to the City to recover payment reimbursements, and Mr. Longo noted that he would look into this area.

Mr. Mellion asked about the storage container rates and usage and Dr. Marks replied that the POD inventory is being examined. Mr. Longo stated that he would assist with this process and will have a report for the February meeting. Mr. Mellion asked about the water damages at Ponus and Mr. Long will look into the claim for reimbursement.

#### Discussion: Grant Carryovers for the 2012-2013 Budget

Mr. Colarossi asked if there can be a report for next month and Mr. Longo replied that final award letters from Title I, 2A will not be received until February. It was agreed to have this information for the March/April meeting.

#### Discussion: Development of Special Education Programs within the Norwalk Public Schools

Mr. Colarossi asked what data needs to be looked at in developing programs and Dr. Marks replied that classroom availability is being assessed for the possibility of moving programs or modifications to current programs. She added that they are currently doing classroom usage surveys being completed by the building principals.

Ms. Murray asked how the dollars calculated from a finance perspective and how this would translate into budget impact. Mr. Daddona explained that money would be saved on out-of-district placements by offering programs at the schools. Mr. Colarossi asked what data was necessary to begin evaluating this, and Dr. Marks replied that a needs assessment is being done currently. She explained that they are looking at the current children with physical and emotional disabilities along with the enrollment projections from ages 3-5 for special education program needs. She noted that there is an increase on the special education spectrum for children with autism and added that this trend is far greater than in years past where children were not accurately diagnosed.

Discussion: Shifting of Grant Funding to the Operating Budget for the 2012-2013.

Mr. Colarossi stated that this would be moved to March/April following review of data requested in item 5.

Discussion of Legal Fees Planned Expenditures for 2012-13.

Mr. Colarossi asked why legal representation is requested at PPT's, and Mr. Daddona explained that PPT's have evolved to be a complicated and involved process and teachers can be tricked into making inaccurate statements by parent lawyers. Mr. Colarossi shared his experiences as a lawyer and stated that parent legal representation cannot cross examine or make comments and that the purpose is a progress report and evaluation of the child.

Mr. Daddona explained that parents now ask for more services and on behalf of the child, special education services are never enough. He added that Connecticut has very liberal laws in favor of parents and it is in the best interest of the district to have legal representation when the parent has a lawyer present. Mr. Colarossi asked for a number of PPT's where there were attorneys present, the settlements by disability, and the nature of the dispute.

Ms. Murray asked for the make up of those in attendance, and Mr. Daddona replied that the PPT is chaired by the Principal, Assistant Principal or designee, Special Education Teacher and related services such as speech/language specialist, classroom teacher, school psychologist and/or Social Worker. He added that the annual review presents an opportunity to start the discussion of services and the potential of bringing them back into the in-district placement. He added that many times a Special Education administrator will attend when they know that it is a difficult meeting or there is a history of circumstances where extraordinary demands are made, but it is a balance of needs assessment and goals.

Mr. Colarossi stated that his goal in asking for this information is not to place a burden on the department by requesting unnecessary data, but there is a basic level of data that they should be prepared to have to develop the programs to reduce out-of-district placements and a return to in-district special education.

### Planning for Future Meetings

Mr. Colarossi noted that the at the next meeting the 2011-12 Budget tracking report will be reviewed in greater detail as it will include encumbrances for more accurate projections for the year-to-date.

Regarding grant carryover information available, Mr. Colarossi stated that he would appreciate having information as soon as it is available to address potential 2012-13 budget shifts from operating to grants.

Regarding out-of-district placements Mr. Colarossi stated that he hopes to be able to have an update on the next steps to begin evaluating the results of the needs assessment data that is being gathered.

Mr. Colarossi noted that the next meeting will be February 8, 2012 at 7:30 p.m.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Marilyn Knox  
Telesco Secretarial Services