

**MANCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION
BUDGET WORKSHOP
TUESDAY, JANUARY 22, 2008**

MINUTES

Presentation Room, MHS
6:00 p.m.

PRESENT: Crockett, Edwards, Moran, Pohl, Rizzo, Stafford

ALSO Superintendent of Schools Dr. Ouellette, Assistant to the
PRESENT: Superintendent for Finance & Management Mrs. Brooks, Assistant
Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction Dr. Richardson, and
Director of Student Support Mrs. Tait

ABSENT: Hackett, Marcano, Small-Miller

Call to Order

Mr. Rizzo called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

A. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mr. Rizzo led the Pledge of Allegiance.

B. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mr. Rizzo called for a Motion to approve the Minutes of January 15, 2008.

MOTION: Crockett/Moran s.v. The Manchester Board of Education approved
the January 15, 2008. Mr. Edwards and Mr. Pohl abstained. 4/0/2.

C. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Tom Stringfellow, 183 Hillstown Road, attended a program in Glastonbury celebrating Martin Luther King's holiday. The keynote speaker was Dr. David Carter, Sr., the Chancellor of higher education. He spoke about equity in education, responsibility and other points. Mr. Stringfellow recommended him as a possible guest speaker at a training forum for the staff in Manchester.

He recommended the following books and articles:

Everything Martin Luther King by Dr. Jessica McElrath for use by Social Studies Teachers

African American National Biography by Oxford University Press, which tells about people in enslavement through the present day and brings up positive contributions.

Christian Science Monitor July 16, 2007 edition with an article about the elusive poverty line.

Mr. Stringfellow noted children have physical ailments that affect their academic abilities, but he thinks the State is doing a fine job working with parents. He spoke about the economy and a possible recession. He would like the people living on fixed incomes kept in mind during budget discussions. Mr. Stringfellow mentioned a recent problem called “brain drain,” which is when college educated young people move out of state. The Leave No Child Behind Act is coming up for reauthorization, but there is still a funding issue. He hopes it will include some flexibility that will help close the achievement gap.

Tracy Schulz Davis, 56 Alexander Street, would like to see funding for the Arts Academy increased. As of last week, five applications have been received from Manchester, three of which are for full-time slots, two for half-time slots. She learned that there are five students who are paying out of pocket for the half-time slots and asked that the half-time slot money be equally divided between everybody.

Ms. Davis asked if the PSATs are still given to all high school students and Dr. Ouellette responded in the affirmative. Ms. Davis asked that the Board consider a different avenue of approach for the students that don’t go on to a four-year college. The students who go to community colleges are given a placement exam and she would like Manchester to switch over to an Accuplacer Exam. From what Ms. Davis sees at the State level, there is a very large disconnect with regular education students that go into community college; they have to take a couple foundational courses before they can start.

Ms. Davis stated she is one hundred percent behind the hiring of a Transition Coordinator. We need someone that knows what’s out there for the kids, whether it be college, technical school, or any other type of training. The kids are getting to their senior year and do not have the plans in place that they need to have.

D. OPENING REMARKS

Mr. Rizzo had no opening remarks and turned the meeting over to Dr. Ouellette.

E. BUDGET DISCUSSION AND BUDGET ADOPTION

Dr. Ouellette stated that the Board of Education has truly supported Equity Programming over the last three or four budgets. The Board members noticed some significant increases in the budget under that line item and had some specific questions. The request for this line item is \$398,104.

Ms. Diane Kearney, Supervisor of Equity Programming, thanked the Board and expressed her excitement that this is a priority. She stated that this is more than a professional landmark for her, it’s personal as well. She doesn’t know that difference was acknowledged in the 1970s, but there is no doubt that difference is acknowledged and respected today. It is her goal as a supervisor to ensure that all children do have an equitable opportunity to be successful. It is important to create an environment that will raise the achievement of all students while narrowing the gap between students of color and the majority population,

which will successfully begin to eliminate the racial predictability and disproportion that exists.

Ms. Kearney first reviewed the Budget Rational Packet she had distributed to Board members. The packet included a racial breakdown of the district as of October 1, 2007. Ms. Kearney stressed that the Board of Education is progressive, as are the Superintendent and her staff. These conversations are happening in very few districts and Manchester is probably the only suburban district having these conversations regularly.

Ms. Kearney continued with her presentation and reviewed accomplishments based on the budget she was given last year. Accomplishments included the hiring of an Equity Facilitator, an increase in the number of students of color inducted into the Junior National Honor Society, ensuring teachers are educated in cultural competence, professional development, stipends for mentors, continuation of the proficiency project and development of student organizations.

The after school program Ms. Kearney is proposing focuses on CAPT-like practices. The Young Women's and Young Men's Leadership Groups' goals and tenets were provided to Board members. These groups were started to prepare young men and women for post-secondary pursuits through active involvement in programs that demonstrate respect for self and others. It's about empowering.

Ms. Kearney has learned that these groups make them feel good about themselves and they want to be part of the organizations. The biggest concern Ms. Kearney has is that they still need academic support. These groups can encourage and encourage, but they really need help academically, especially in math.

Ms. Kearney would like the after school program to meet two to three days a week, ideally Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday. She has set the program up in ten week sessions to coincide with the quarters. The first quarter will be spent preparing the program, then quarters two, three, and four will each serve about twenty-five students. The goal of the program is to improve academic performance, empower students to believe in themselves, and teach what it means to embrace a work ethic. Students will be identified through their eighth grade CMT scores and ninth grade CAPT scores. Ms. Kearney emphasized the need for parents to be involved.

Mr. Pohl asked where each school is in terms of faculty engaged being in courageous conversations. Ms. Kearney stated that all schools are participating in some capacity. Each school is at a different place in the program. Last year twenty staff participated. At the end of this year, 150 staff will have participated, representing 20% of the total staff.

Mr. Pohl asked for an update on Best Mentors. Ms. Kearney stated there are 60 year one and year two teachers and 12 programs and seminars that teachers and mentors are invited to participate in. Ms. Kearney explained that criteria includes meeting with mentees at least once a month, they are encouraged to attend meetings put on throughout the school year, and they are expected to give whatever support the mentee needs.

Mr. Pohl asked if any other organizations exist to encourage empowerment. Ms. Kearney explained that Mr. Uyi Osunde meets with students from Nathan Hale and Washington Schools, the middle school and the high school who are the most disconnected and disenfranchised. He holds group and individual mentoring.

Mr. Pohl asked what is being done at the elementary level to decrease the achievement gap. Ms. Kearney explained that the elementary level is where we are seeing the bulk of participation in Beyond Diversity, being approximately two years ahead of the secondary level.

Mr. Crockett asked if any standards were lowered with regard to the Junior National Honor Society. Ms. Kearney answered in the negative.

Ms. Rhonda Philbert, K-12 Equity Facilitator, explained that the national standard is a minimum of 3.0 GPA. At Illing Middle School, the minimum GPA was 3.4. That has now changed to 3.1.

Mr. Moran asked Ms. Kearney to elaborate on the parental involvement strategies. She explained that parents are expected to attend five meetings and maintain a relationship with the child's teachers to make sure each child is changing his habits. The parents will be sent bi-weekly or monthly progress reports and every piece of correspondence possible. The most important piece is getting the parents to attend the meetings. At the meetings we will discuss successes only, validating their children.

Mr. Edwards asked how many classrooms are culturally responsive at this time. Ms. Kearney stated that twelve are now, and by the end of the school year there will be sixteen.

Mr. Edwards verified some details on the CAPT after school program and asked if each quarter would include 25 different children, or the same 25 students. Ms. Kearney said ideally different children, but if a child would like to participate a second time, she will not turn the student away. Mr. Edwards would like to make sure good records are kept on the students involved in the after school program.

Mr. Rizzo noted the budget includes 2 teachers and Ms. Kearney explained the teachers would be co-teaching. Mr. Rizzo is happy to see us moving in this direction and doing something after school. He agrees that this can't be just another after school program, but he also believes it can't mirror what they do in the classroom every day. Ms. Kearney agreed and added that school credit should be given to them for attending.

Ms. Jenifer Tait, Director of Student Support Services, presented her proposed budget using a PowerPoint presentation that included a review of initiatives, discipline data, requests for new staff, an explanation of tuition, grant explanations, and a listing of private schools in Manchester and the costs associated with them.

Ms. Tait reported that expulsions have decreased from 31 students in 04-05 to 18 students in 06-07 and suspensions have decreased by 50% from 2006 to 2007.

Ms. Tait explained the need for several new staff positions, including:

1 FTE Behaviorist

Reasons:

- \$75,666 spent on behavior consultants to date
- Increasing need for Applied Behavior Analysis
- Parent and staff training
- Rapid response to significant behaviors

Outcomes:

- Fewer out-of-district placements
- Reduced use of ISS and OSS
- Decrease in disproportionate representation
- Decreased disruption to learning with a more timely response
- Improve student achievement with greater time on task

1 FTE Early Childhood Education (ECEP) Teacher

Reasons:

- In September we had 90 children in the program
- We now have 109 children in the program
- As of 12/07, classes average 12 children
- There are 27 children who may be eligible to enter our program prior to July 1, 2008
- Expect average class size to rise to 15 students and the inclusion ratio will decrease
- Inclusion requires that at least 50% of the children be typically developing peers
- As of 12/07, the ratios in our program average close to 70% students with special needs

Outcomes:

- Meet required inclusionary practice
- Smaller class sizes
- Allow special focus for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
- Closing the achievement gap and increasing readiness for school

.6 FTE Speech and Language

Reasons:

- Increasing numbers of preschool children with ASD need social language communication skills
- New ECEP class will need language intervention
- Children with augmentative communication devices need certified staff to train and monitor use of equipment

Outcomes:

- Children will have effective communication skills needed for Kindergarten

- Training for parents, paraprofessionals, teachers in promoting social communication skills

1 FTE Transition Teacher and 1 classroom paraprofessional/job coach

Reasons:

- 252 students at MHS eligible for special services
- As of 12/07, 23 required more specialized services
- 6 expected to graduate 6/08
- 8 expected to enter 08-09
- High School Transition Requirements:
 - The State Department of Education collects data pertaining to students with disabilities and transition outcomes
 - This data is reflected on the State Performance Plan
 - Under IDEA we are required to educate students with disabilities until age 21
 - Not only must we educate them, but we must prepare them for the road ahead
- Current Expenditures for Transition:
 - One student is at a private program at Chapel Haven for \$48,000 for the year (DCF placed)
 - One student is attending Manchester High School on A days and attends MARC on B days costing \$32,900 for the year
 - Two students attend a workshop program in Hartford costing \$13,320 each for the year
 - Another is enrolled at Gengras Center costing \$47,500 for the year

Outcomes:

- There are initially 8 students who require more significant transition supports and services
- These students will also require vocational counselor, social worker, occupational therapist, and job coach supports
- This new class can serve up to 12 students.
- The students will:
 - Have met BOE requirements for graduation
 - Gain independence
 - Improve social and communication skills
 - Have opportunities to secure competitive employment
 - Be able to navigate throughout the community
 - Develop friendships
 - Participate in recreational interests
 - Engage in adult services

F. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Mr. Pohl asked if Manchester is doing enough to address the needs of the special education students. Manchester seemed to be significantly lower than the State average.

Ms. Tait noted that in the last round of CAPT testing at the high school is where the gap has decreased at this level. It is believed it is because of the work Mrs. Matfess has done with the high school staff in terms of inclusion. Students have better access to the regular general education curriculum.

Mrs. Shelly Matfess, Secondary Special Education Supervisor, explained that when she first came to Manchester High School three years ago, many students were not included in regular education classes. They moved through a core group of special education teachers and didn't have the opportunity to participate in regular curriculum. One of the things Mrs. Matfess did was to assign all high school teachers two departments of their choice and expertise. Then she provided co-teaching training through the State Education Resource Center (SERC). Students began participating in regular education and teachers are co-teaching. With this model, progress has been made at the high school level. Teachers are planning together, they have access to curriculum, and students' standards have been raised.

Mr. Pohl asked if this is being addressed at the elementary level as well. Mrs. Matfess answered that the same thing is happening at the elementary level; students are included in regular education classes. If a student isn't challenged with his general education peers and special education educators do not have access to the regular curriculum, that gap keeps growing.

Mr. Pohl asked for an explanation on the decrease in expulsions. Ms. Tait explained that several factors contributed to this decrease. She explained that the Expulsion Committee meets and looks at the recommendation for expulsion, the child's record, and the incident. The Committee will send the principal back to look at the program, look at supports and services, and look at what the child needs. The Committee has helped the schools make behavior plans for all children; regular education and special education children. In some instances, a behaviorist has been brought in to look at the classroom setup. Our schools are involved in Positive Behavior Support (PBS), which looks to see if the child was ever taught the expected behavior, was the expected behavior reinforced and how, and do we need to re-teach it, before taking disciplinary action. The issue is, the longer children are out of their classroom, the less access they have to curriculum. We need to keep the children in the classroom.

Mr. Pohl asked how far PBS has gone and if money is included in the budget for this. Ms. Tait explained that the training is free, but money is needed for the substitute teachers. Currently there are three schools in year three, some in year two, five in year one, and four more will come into the program next year. Manchester is actually one of the few districts where we have rolled out early intervention in every single building, courageous conversations in every single building, a plan to roll out PBS in every single building, and inclusion training in every single building. Most districts choose a school and focus on that school.

Mr. Edwards asked for Ms. Tait's thoughts on the controversial idea of screening all children for autism and the impact on Manchester Public Schools. Ms. Tait stated that part of the consulting budget includes those types of assessments. The stand on autism is similar for

other disabilities; we do not screen the entire population, we screen and evaluate as something develops. Children on the moderate to severe end come to us through Birth to Three already identified.

Mr. Edwards asked how the proportionality works with the non-public funding. The increase from 1.5% to 3% implies a doubling. Ms. Tait answered that the number last year was 16 on individual plans and this year there are 30 children on individual plans.

Mr. Edwards asked if the standards have now been lowered because the expulsion process is tougher and principals think twice before proceeding. Ms. Tait explained that the Committee did not lower standards; instead it is trying to find out why particular children are multiple offenders.

Mr. Edwards then asked if the students are staying longer in the classroom, are they impacting the education of every other student in the classroom. This is a balance that we as a society have to strike. Ms. Tait related the other options available over the last few years. MRA and Bentley have programs that have more structure and provide more attention for students who need it. State legislation changed so that out of school suspensions are disallowed for everything except very egregious behaviors. We have looked at alternates and teaching the behavior we want.

G. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Ms. Melissa Dumont invited the Board to a meeting of the Manchester Support Group for Special Education and distributed cards with the meeting time and place. She commented that pediatricians can screen for autism beginning at about 12 months. She also commented that the law states a child should be included as appropriate; for some children it may never be appropriate.

Mr. Tom Stringfellow supports Ms. Kearney's CAPT after school program, BEST, and the Young Women's Leadership group. He stated that we have to teach children about tolerance, not prejudice. More volunteers, especially mentors, are needed. We can't lower our standards.

Mr. Stringfellow recommended the following:

Keeping Black Boys Out of Special Education by Jawanza Kunjufu.

Envy of the World by Ellis Cose.

On Frontline, "Asperger's Syndrome in Adolescence."

H. CLOSING COMMENTS

Dr. Ouellette thanked Ms. Kearney and Ms. Tait for their presentations and reminded the Board that the next Budget Workshop will be Tuesday, January 29, 2008 at 6:00 p.m. in the Presentation Room.

Mr. Rizzo asked that at a future budget meeting the administration provide an overview of magnet school enrollees and funding.

I. ADJOURN

Mr. Rizzo called for a motion to adjourn.

MOTION: Edwards/Crockett s.v. To adjourn: 8:09 p.m. 6/0/0.

Respectfully submitted,

Enrique Marcano, Secretary
Manchester Board of Education