

**TOLLAND TOWN COUNCIL/BOARD OF EDUCATION  
JOINT MEETING  
LIBRARY PROGRAM ROOM  
February 24, 2020 – 7:00 P.M.**

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*Sheila M. Bailey*

**TOWN COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:** Tammy Nuccio, Chair; Steven Jones, Vice Chair; Robert Abbate, Brenda Falusi, Lou Luba, John Reagan, Kurt Schenher

**TOWN COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT:** none

**BOARD OF EDUCATION MEMBERS PRESENT:** Ashley Lundgren, Chair; Christina Plourd, Vice Chair; Tony Holt, Secretary; Renie Besaw, Christine Griffin, Kate Howard- Bender, Karen Moran, Dana Philbin

**BOARD OF EDUCATION MEMBERS ABSENT:** Jacob Marie

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Michael Rosen, Town Manager; Dr. Walter Willett, Superintendent

1. **Call to Order:** Mr. Rosen called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.  
Mr. Rosen reviewed the Budget process and timeline.
2. **Board of Education Budget Presentation**  
Dr. Willett reviewed an introductory presentation which included the following highlights:
  - Budget FAQ – [http://www.tolland.k12.ct.us/board\\_of\\_education/budget](http://www.tolland.k12.ct.us/board_of_education/budget)
  - Area of Consideration
    - Board of Education Budget for Fiscal Year 2021 (BOEB FY21)
      - \$40,590,408 representing a \$614,803 increase (1.54%) over the FY20 budget
      - two major cost drivers for the BOEB for FY21 included negotiated bargaining unit agreements, and insurance
    - Bargaining Unit Results
    - Enrollment adjustments – Teacher staffing
    - Per Pupil Expenditure
    - Class Size Research
    - Estimated Class Sizes FY21
    - Class Size Considerations
    - Grants (outside of the scope/impact of the operating budget)
  - Overview of Information
    - Comparative Budget Data: 1.54% as a reasonable budget request
    - Lighthouse Initiatives – designed to reduce outplacements and attrition
      - Lighthouse Program Support
      - Excellent Alternatives to Outplacement
3. **Recommendations and suggestions to BOE regarding consolidation of non-education services and cost savings (per State Statutes (Public Act 13-60))**  
Ms. Nuccio opened the floor to questions.
  - From the consolidation perspective, Ms. Nuccio inquired if other districts have expressed interest in sending students to the Tolland for the Tolland Business Academy (TBA). *Dr. Willett explained that other districts have inquired about the TBA model but have not yet expressed interest in sending students. He explained that he does not believe the district is ready to receive students from outside of the district but this is something that is in the prospectus. He added that the objective for programs such STEAM and STEM is to not only address attrition but also to attract students.*

- In regard to students who tuition-in to LEAP, Ms. Nuccio inquired as to where the dollars are reflected in the budget. *Dr. Willett responded that the dollars would likely be under salaries and/or personnel as an offset. It would depend on the specific need.*

4. **Questions from the public (2 minute limit) specific to the Board of Education budget with questions being directed by the Town Council Chair to the appropriate body for response.**

Melanie Goodin, 406 Buff Cap Road, advocated for freshman sports. She believes in this day and age when they are trying to get kids to be more active and outside, having thirty more boys sit at home on their Xboxes and computers and not have the opportunity to play sports is a "shame" for the town. Parents are paying a high per sport price of \$200/student/sport and while there is a cap, it is essentially a tax on families with athletic kids. Freshman sports are an opportunity for students to make friends and learn teamwork. Taking this away causes a loss of opportunities and the chance for kids to grow and make lifelong friends. In regard to cost savings, she identified two items. First, the Board looked at postage. There are a lot of efficiencies available with text and e-mail. She has two THS students and she received letters regarding the SAT being a shortened day which was wasteful as the cost of stamps increases. Additionally, after students play sports students receive a survey about the sports program in which they participated. Ms. Goodin commented that students do not complete paper surveys and recommended sending an e-mail. While small, these are cost savings that add up. Second, in regard to the bus contract, it was extended for another year without going out to bid. She sees multiple buses go by and when in the parking lot she sees ½ empty buses. She requested that before the bid is out that Board members do an unbiased audit of the bus situation as there could be a cost savings. *Dr. Willett explained that the new athletic surveys are online and have been factored in. The postage line item is mostly for business office operations where there has been an increase in correspondence. In regard to the bus contract, they have scrutinized the process. He believes the contract is fair and competitive after having done research and consulted with professionals. The district is responsible for transporting students regardless as to if they have a ride. They have reduced the number of buses in the fleet to adjust but there needs to be leeway due to families' fluctuations.*

Mary Rose Dubarek, 37 Ryan Road, thanked Dr. Willett for addressing her question via e-mail but wanted the public to know the answer as well. She inquired as to how much savings is found from cutting freshman sports (baseball and basketball). Additionally, is Pay for Play taken into consideration? Lastly, she inquired about the rationale behind the THS athletic department in offering freshman sports as a savings. *Dr. Willett explained that part of the Superintendent's budget was to reduce three freshman sports and the Board brought back freshman girls volleyball. The two remaining sports provide a savings of approximately \$10,000. Ultimately what is collected from Pay to Play is part of the picture. The reduction was one of many area cuts that were made to create a responsible budget that would maintain programs and pass at referendum. In regard to the rationale, this was a cut that does not jeopardize a program in its entirety.*

Gary Lotrek, 12 Holly Road, explained that he is involved with his church's mental health groups. The Town Council discussed this topic including reaching out to where the kids are. They know where the kids are 7 hours a day. In his school of 357 students they have 2 guidance counselors, 2 full time social workers, a clinician, 2 behavior technicians, a dean of students, an assistant principal, and a principal. Tolland has 1 social worker for K-12 in a town with nearly double the suicide rate of similarly sized towns in the area. Kids are not going to go to a club or tell their soccer coach that they are depressed – it is about checking in with kids where they are. Having 1 social worker for K-12 is not ok. He asked why they only have 1 social worker and are not funding far more than that for counseling services in the schools. *Dr. Willett explained that part of the reason for looking closely at attrition and outplacements is because he knows they can build internal capacity by focusing on some of the programs and doing the right thing by kids who need special services and in turn leveraging those positions for students in other populations. Students who are not part of the LEAP program are benefitting from its services and staff. Social/emotional learning is an important part of the future for students in CT. The State has made this one of its priorities as have the legislators and*

*Dr. Willett would like to see support from the State. Locally, they have seen an increase in mental health needs for students and family populations. It would be good over time to build resources in the district for all populations. One way they are approaching this is by leveraging the positions in LEAP for other populations. Going forward they will look to build upon these resources but the current budget is what they can do at this time. Ms. Nuccio clarified that the district now has 2 social workers.*

Kate Vallo, 80 Tolland Green, expressed concern that the trend has not kept pace with maintaining level services. As an educator she understands the importance of not only maintaining level services but also seeking continuous improvement within the education setting and is impressed with the Superintendent's ability to seek improvement over the past several years despite not maintaining level services. She inquired of the Town Council how the town can continue to invest in all aspects of the schools, particularly in mental health and tracts such as art, STEAM, and STEM, both in the short and long term given the difficult position the town is in. *Mr. Luba responded they also need to look at the student population. Over the past decade the population has decreased by over 700 students. Based upon the projections of the CT Data Center (included in the Tolland Conditions and Trends) they are looking to lose another 1,000 students. Ms. Falusi commented that this data is for Tolland County. Mr. Luba explained that if so the town document needs to be corrected since it shows that over 700 students have been lost over the past decade and it is projected that the population will continue to decrease. Given this they need to look at right-setting the size of the schools. The town has already lost the equivalent of one school.*

Ms. Vallo clarified that she is asking about the Town Council's commitment to the investment in quality education looking forward. *Mr. Luba responded that he is committed to the town having a high quality education. Within this budget the Town Council needs to review the budget presented by the Board and determine what is appropriate. Ms. Nuccio explained that a better definition of "level services" is needed. One cannot just say this means keeping the budget the same and adding contractual increases. One has to make adjustments for lost enrollment and they are doing so.*

Ms. Vallo asked what specifically the Council intends to do to appropriately fund and address the value of quality education in Tolland. *Ms. Nuccio commented that she is committed to quality education. Tolland has a great education system. One does not have a 100% graduation rate, and looking back graduation rates in the mid to high nineties, without a great education system and they want to continue to provide this to students. An educated populace is the best populace and it takes investment. Mental health is another area of focus and they are looking at this. The Council is looking at creating a commission for substance use disorder and mental health to look at the services available in town and coordinate them to make the information easier for people to access. Ms. Nuccio discussed some of the resources in the schools.*

Ms. Vallo commented that it is the schools' job to determine how to best supply the resources and the Town Council's job to fund the schools so they can do that. She is hearing from the Board and the Superintendent that they are unable to quite maintain level services and there are things they would like to do. What is the commitment from the Town Council? She is seeking a philosophical commitment. *Mr. Jones commented that one of the Council's goals is a re-implementation of the shared services committee which will allow for more engagement and discussion about priorities and long term sustainability. Ms. Falusi added that the Council has a commitment to implement the findings in the POCD and ensuring services are available for the towns' households – this includes education. The Council's Visions and Goals are available at [www.tolland.org](http://www.tolland.org).*

Bob Rubino, 296 Weigold Road, commented that he and his wife have just entered the fastest growing demographic in Tolland – that of the retired. After thirty four years of doing this they are continuing to do what has always been done – talk about cuts and savings. The Superintendent hinted at the changing circumstances. Mr. Rubino explained that the world is changing. The population of the schools is going down. The fixed cost per student is increasing. One fixes this by filling the schools by having a robust educational system that causes people to say that Tolland is where they want to raise their families. People will move to Tolland and pay "whatever" for that real estate. Not only does this fill the schools, it fills the

general fund. He is not saying to build more houses but to fill the ones they have with families who are going to pay those prices. A better way to do it is the Tolland Business Academy (TBA). The Superintendent has already provided \$1M/year in cost savings/cost avoidance. The Council should ask the Superintendent to tell them more – that they have heard that there is a plan. Mr. Rubino would like someone to ask the Superintendent what needs to be done this year to make it a reality. This will allow Tolland to fill its schools with students from other towns – regionalization. *Ms. Nuccio commented she has asked Dr. Willett specifically about the TBA and about the narrative and reiterated that Dr. Willett does not believe the program is ready to take in students from other towns just yet. They are supportive of the TBA.* Mr. Rubino commented that he applauds this but does not believe the Board "got that memo". At the meetings he heard that the Board was more interested in cutting and a sense that they were going to present the lowest possible budget rather than discussing educational investment and presenting it to the Council. *Ms. Nuccio explained that if Dr. Willett is not ready to tuition-in then it is not fair to say that the Board did not do its job by not asking for more. It is up to Dr. Willett to drive that conversation. The purpose of the lighthouse is to create programs to keep students in district and have students tuition-in. Dr. Willett explained that having students tuition-in is the "gravy". The avoidance of attrition is key.*

Jan Rubino, 296 Weigold Road, asked Dr. Willett if the district would be further ahead in regard to the TBA if there were not year over year budget cuts. *Dr. Willett responded he works with what is provided. This year the Board has made compromises to achieve the 1.54% which is why he feels so strongly that the budget should be accepted as is. Creating level service budgets means you do not have to have reductions which is generally preferable. The teams of elected professionals work together to try to find the best way forward and he works for all of them. Mr. Holt commented that the Board's conversations were not about reductions but about finding efficiencies. If certain programs needed additional funding, before asking for more they looked to see if there could be redistribution. Mr. Luba commented that one needs to look at supply and demand as well. If the mill rate is increased to a point where people cannot afford to live in town then it does not matter how good the educational system is. He understands Mr. Rubino's position but they need to find the proper balance.* Mr. Rubino commented that if they want to get off the merry-go-round they should think of the schools as a profit center. *Dr. Willett cautioned that schools are not a business. The Tolland system is not better off than it was – it has lost programs. Part of this is due to unfunded mandates – the district needs to do things it did not need to do before. One needs to be careful when making a person by dollar by enrollment comparison. There will be significant damage below 1.54%. The budget was put together with purposeful intent to prevent the schools from going backward in a significant way. Dr. Willett cautioned against putting a business model on the budget.*

Sam Adlerstein, 164 Pine Hill Road, asked what the difference is in the maintenance budget. Dr. Willett's numbers show that over the past 3 years the contractual costs increased approximately \$3M compared to the budget. About \$1M of this was covered by what he has done with special education. What was sacrificed in the \$2M gap? Those who have done research and looked at other districts see that Tolland does not have intervention support, technology, social/emotional support, or low class sizes and people need to understand this. If people do not know this it is because the Board has not had the proper conversation. The past three Board chairs have all had the same message and that was to discuss what he noted. The Board's job is to review the budget, discuss the quality of education, and discuss what is changing. His question to the Board is what has changed? Mr. Adlerstein noted that he is not saying that a maintenance budget is the goal but to what degree is the same quality of education being offered that was available 3 years ago? Perhaps the answer is that it cannot be afforded and if so the Board should walk people through where things should be but do not start with "we cannot afford it". In regard to what is affordable, the information in the last budget shows the ECS grant since last year has increased but many Board members have said the reason things cannot be afforded is due to a reduction in the ECS grant which is not the case. Further, the budget mailers which have been sent over the past few years show the unassigned reserve fund going down. In fact, the unassigned reserve fund has actually increased over \$1M.

The Board's intent is relevant because this evening's meeting is in regard to Public Act 13-60; the challenge is that this is all that has been discussed during the budget process. *Ms. Nuccio explained that Mr. Adlerstein is asking her to police what the Board is doing and that is not her role. This is a joint meeting for the Town Council to ask about the budget. Ms. Philbin believes Mr. Adlerstein's question was directed to the Board. Mr. Holt noted that the Board has a meeting this week and invited Mr. Adlerstein to ask his questions at that time so they may be addressed and they can be discussed further. Ms. Nuccio addressed the questions on ECS and the unassigned reserve fund. The \$333K ECS reduction can be reviewed at the CT Department of Finance website. In regard to the general fund, \$1.2M is money the Board did not spend and went directly into the general fund. From there, the Board has looked at projects that will draw off that account. The biggest piece of the general fund's increase was dollars the Board did not spend. She added that she will be working with the finance department to simplify what happened over the past 10 years and the drivers. Mr. Adlerstein commented that everyone went to referendum and voted for a budget. What Ms. Nuccio is saying is that the budget that was voted for was changed. The residents know the information provided when making a decision to vote. Mr. Adlerstein has a problem with a budget that was changed after the vote. Further, in regard to the \$1.2M that was turned back from the Board, it is important that people understand why that happened. Ms. Falusi commented that there was as public hearing and 2/3rds of those who spoke wanted more money to go to the Board and the Council did not follow what the majority of people wanted. Ms. Nuccio clarified that that was the majority of those who attended the public hearing, not the Town and does not follow with what the Council was told by the State in regard to what was allowable with that money.*

Colleen Yudichak, 12 Blueberry Hill, believes the Board could have had a level budget but she is in support of the budget it has presented. She would like Dr. Willett to identify what would happen if the budget was reduced below 1.54%. *Dr. Willett explained that the 1.54% is as low as he would want to go for the educational system right now. If reductions had to be made they would compromise programs and staff structures. In regard to specifics, it would depend on the amount of the reduction.*

George Ulrich, Fish and Game Road, commented that they are nickel and diming items where there are millions that could be saved. All they have to do is use common sense. They are running the schools at 50-60% capacity. He recommended closing a school – specifically TIS should have been closed years ago. The money spent on overhead can be saved. Right now the schools have a capacity of 3,800 students. He added that they have lost teachers but not overhead. There is an extra principal and vice principal as well as others... all those people should be gone. Closing a school will reduce 25% of costs and save real money – not worry about \$10K for basketball. *Ms. Howard-Bender asked if he would like to tell her child in a class of 25 that there should be a class size of 30 because this is what it would look like. Dr. Willett commented that they have looked at closing a school and a DRA study was done. In respect to this, they are not in a position to close a school. The student population is not so low that there are unreasonable numbers in the schools. Based on the DRA study, consolidating schools would not be possible for a few years and would require building out. As the Superintendent what is being proposed would be disastrous. Administrators are working very hard and are overloaded. If they get the sense the Board or town wants to cut them the district will lose highly trained professionals. What is being suggested is very radical and would very much compromise the quality of education. Mr. Ulrich commented that there are 41 classrooms in the new school and 476 students. Dr. Willett invited Mr. Ulrich to tour the schools with him. Ms. Nuccio added that it is not simple math. A lot of state mandates direct that they need certain rooms for certain items that are not necessarily instructional classrooms. Dr. Willett noted that the current classrooms are 100% utilized to fulfill the requirements.*

Carleen Oehmsen, 20 Beech Road, explained she has 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> graders. Tolland has a 100% graduation rate but not everything is what it seems. She works at a high school as a substance abuse counselor and has a private practice specializing in adolescents. She knows a lot of students who were pushed through the

system and a 100% graduation rate means nothing to her because she knows directives teachers have been given to move students along. She inquired in regard to the 100% graduation success rate and what was the budget like when they were in kindergarten? What was cut for them if anything? What tools did they have to have the 100% graduation rate? When she looks at her kids so much is lacking and she does not know what that rate will be when they graduate. *Ms. Plourd asked that Ms. Oehmsen e-mail the Board with what she feels is lacking for her students. Ms. Nuccio agreed that the numbers can be painted a number of ways and understands and respects the observation. Tolland does a great job of making college the desired path but this is not always the best as there are other options.*

Linda Scheidel, 81 Morgan Lane, commented that we are living in a global and highly technological society. Students graduating now had language, a technology class, and a computer lab in elementary school. Birch Grove does not have language or technology. She heard a rumor that the Town Council wanted a 0% increase across the board. When the Board hears this they are not going to put language or computers back into the elementary school because it will increase the budget and the Town Council will shut it down. She asked if the Town Council wanted 0% across the board which gave the Board an unfair vision going into its budget. *Ms. Nuccio commented that based on her experience she does not believe there has been foreign language at Birch Grove for many years. The Town Council gave a directive to all to show what a budget would look like with a 0% increase and what it would mean for the town as well as a level services budget. The Town Council does not yet have a budget, only pieces. (The discussions took place at the December 12<sup>th</sup> Town Council goal setting meeting.) Mr. Holt noted that the intent was to present a budget that met the needs of the students.*

Shay Belair, 185 Kozley Road, noted that she is a parent and teacher in Tolland. For the past 3 years the budget cuts have personally affected her children and it will affect her children and students next year as far as class sizes, services, and social/emotional learning. She believes Dr. Willett did what was best for the town and while she is not happy with the budget she will support it. It impacts everyone – sports, arts, education, and social/emotional learning. She understands the financial situation in town and will work as hard as she can for her students and support her children but she does not believe the school system can handle another dip next year without significantly impacting education and the social/emotional wellbeing of the students.

Mary Rose Dubarek, 37 Ryan Road, asked what it says "about us as a society" that we take great pride in being 130<sup>th</sup> in expenditures per pupil as opposed to number 1. What message does that send to the students and families? *Ms. Nuccio responded that she believes it is an efficient one. Tolland has always been in the lower quadrant and has had very successful students. She does not equate the money spent to quality education. If this was the case they would see towns which are spending significantly more producing highly successful students. Education is more than just a dollar amount. Ms. Plourd commented that they have been efficient. It shows Tolland has a great system and as she has said before she is grateful to live in Tolland. She does not feel entitled to more. Due diligence was done on the budget and some items were added back. She supports the 1.54% and asked that the Council support it as well.*

Liz Costa, 54 Josiah Lane, spoke on education and the town's high graduation rate. She explained that much of this is due to the high per capita income and highly educated townspeople as well as the SAT scores. Given the \$1.2M "stolen" two years ago, will the Council consider bringing back 2 teachers and freshman sports with the \$135-\$140K? *Ms. Nuccio responded that she does not believe this is a fair question given that the Council has not yet seen a budget. Ms. Costa commented that 1 art teacher was lost at THS which will cut 6 sections of art, one 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, and freshman sports. Given that, would the Council support giving part of the \$1.2M back to the Board for these items? Ms. Nuccio commented that the Town Council cannot tell the Board what to do. Mr. Luba added that the question was posed to Dr. Willett that if the money was found if the position would be replaced and he responded that there was not a need for the*

*position. Ms. Nuccio noted that funds from the \$1.2M have been going back to the Board and that Ms. Costa is asking that they give "one time" money to fund an ongoing expense. Ms. Costa commented that it would demonstrate a commitment from the Council to the town's education system which drives the cost of housing and people coming to Tolland. Ms. Falusi commented that it is something she would look at. Mr. Holt commented that they are taking advantage of a lot of that money for the students. The budget choices were made by the Board by a democratic vote with the advice of Dr. Willett. His expertise was utilized for the Board to come up with the most responsible budget. Ms. Besaw added that the Superintendent's 1.87% budget had fewer services than the 1.54% budget. Ms. Griffin added that if they took the 1.87% presented by Dr. Willett and added all the savings it would be much less than 1.54%. They added a lot back that they believed to be important educational programs for students' success. Ms. Philbin commented that the 1.54% did bring back many services such as RAZ and Literacy How but they were able to do this due to the reduction in the health insurance line. This was not available when Dr. Willett presented the 1.87% and if that money was available he may not have proposed all of the cuts.*

Jennifer McLarney, 237 Kozley Road, commented as a parent and employee of the BOE. Good education costs money. Tolland needs to stop accepting the "do it for less" mindset. The budget voted in is a reflection of what is valued. Do we value education with this budget? *Mr. Holt responded that he agreed and that education is not cheap, nor should it be – excellent education even less so. His intent was to be sure they money they had was being spent in the most efficient way before asking for more.*

Sam Adlerstein, 164 Pine Hill Road, asked that the Town Council and the Board own their positions. It is nothing to be ashamed of to be driven by prioritizing revenues and mill rate. The agenda has been to have a "low as you can go" budget process – this has been the position. He asked that they own it. *Ms. Nuccio responded that she does not have a problem saying this. They need to balance and think about the mill rate, loss in revenues, and the impact from the state. They need to think about the budget and still be able to have people age in place. Mr. Abbate added that just because he has not been vocal does not mean he does not own it. He owns all of his decisions. Mr. Jones commented that he agrees with the sentiment that they should own it. They need to be able to advocate for the budget. If the budget fails at referendum things will only get worse. Mr. Adlerstein commented that he was referring to those who have made public statements that they have a fiscally conservative mill rate and revenue-reduction agenda. Mr. Luba commented that he will never back down from any position he takes. If he is wrong he will admit it but he will stand by every statement and position he makes. Mr. Reagan added that he owns it when he votes.*

Gary Lotrek, 12 Holly Road, commented that it is what one is willing to accept. No one is against education but it is expensive. He observed the Board's budget process and the discussion about money. He does not want to accept – he wants to raise and increase. Further, with all due respect, he wishes the members were nicer to each other. They represent the town. If he were to bring his children he would want to show them civic leadership.

Liz Costa, 54 Josiah Lane, asked Ms. Nuccio what competitive means to her relative to the education system. When does the town begin to be competitive with other towns from an education point of view? When does Tolland add to the education system and become competitive so people start buying houses in town? *Ms. Nuccio responded that this is not something can be answered right now. It is something they will need to think about as they go through the process.*

George Ulrich, Fish and Game Road, commented that he noticed a reduction of approximately 60 students this year and this in keeping with a 1:20 student/teacher ratio so this would be a loss of 3 teachers. He understands a 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher retired, a 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher is moving to the 4<sup>th</sup> grade, and the art teacher retired. People are not losing their jobs. *Ms. Moran commented that the 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher is not retiring. The other thing that "galls" him is they keep talking about reducing. In his lifetime he never recalls the town*

or school budget being reduced. It has been about reducing the amount of the increase. State law says they cannot even reduce the school budget over that of the previous year. Thus nothing is being reduced... they are only cutting the size of the increase.

*Ms. Plourd commented in regard to Ms. Costa's comment on commitment. Ms. Plourd explained that over the past couple of years her property taxes have gone up 22%. It is not a one agenda item she is after – it is looking at everything and advocating for people like her. She has a 4.5 year old and a 10 month old. They will be going to the schools and if she is priced out she will have to move and she does not want to. She respectfully asked the Chair that they continue the meeting with the Town Council so they can discuss the other items on the agenda.*

Madhu Renduchintala, 93 Hurlbut Road, commented that other towns are investing 2.5-4% as an increase yet Tolland is discussing a budget that will do the least amount of harm.

*Ms. Philbin commented, in regard to Mr. Lotrek's comment that she will commit to doing her due diligence to being a team player and lead by example for families and children. She will be as respectful as possible and listen because everyone brings a multitude of diverse thought.*

*Ms. Moran commented that as far as enrollment and the reduction in the student population they are starting to see an uptick in the lower grades. She added that some items have gone up including trauma and mental health issues such as anxiety and suicidal thoughts in students. This is not the education system she is familiar with from when she graduated. Cuts to staff, even three, mean fewer adults in front of students which isn't good. Fewer adults are making connections with students. They are also in a state of emergency in regard to the rebuilding of the elementary school and no other towns are dealing with this. She hopes the community understands what it is up against. With all this going on she feels they should be investing in the school system. At the last Board meeting she advocated for 1.85% to keep the schools somewhat whole but still would mean cuts. This increase would have kept sports, art, and the 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher to be there for kids. She believes 1.85% is still a reasonable budget.*

**5. Petitions and/or questions to the Board of Education from Town Council members specific to the BOE Budget.**

- Mr. Luba commented that there is a \$46K expense included as part of the Board's budget for moving costs to Birch Grove. As a member of the Birch Grove Building Committee, Mr. Luba knows this was included as part of the contractor's cost and is being covered by the state. Is this a duplicate cost that could be reallocated to support items that are being cut? *Dr. Willett has looked at this. Their experience is that not all of the items are being covered and they have included this to be proactive for the district. The funds need to be available to execute activities on a very short timeline. If they fall off the timeline there could be very negative ramifications. If the funds are received from the state they can be rolled over to the town or do something else with them. Ms. Nuccio commented that last year \$75K was put aside for items that were not included in the Birch Grove numbers. Dr. Willett responded that he believes money will be needed to address wetland items such as berms and adjustments. These are operational items and they are acting on the experience being brought to them from the professionals. It is what is needed for what could potentially happen and he would be very nervous about altering it. Ms. Nuccio commented that many of these items are one-time expenses that are in an operating budget and inquired if there is another way they could be addressed. A brief discussion took place.*
- Mr. Luba spoke in regard to the professional development line item. He is in support of having robust professional development because education is constantly evolving. A lot of the money was going toward LEAP and other items and Mr. Luba asked if this is a one-time cost and if ongoing, was the Board advised of this? *Dr. Willett explained that they are responding to what is happening. For*



*example, now there is a greater focus on dyslexia and they need to be responsive to the needs of students or outplacements will need to be made. They are always adjusting to ensure students are covered morally and ethically educationally and that the district is protected and well positioned to service students. Some items are for baseline training while others are so they can be responsive to new situations including the upcoming accreditation process. Mr. Luba requested a granular breakdown of this line item in the future. Ms. Plourd and Mr. Holt reviewed the Board's decision regarding the decision to expand Literacy How. Mr. Luba believes he can now support this line item based on the information provided.*

- Ms. Nuccio requested a granular breakdown of what the finance and facilities committee did during its meeting for the March meeting.
- Ms. Nuccio requested further information about the athletic stipend line.
- Mr. Jones inquired if when there is a reduction in classroom instructional supplies and materials if some teachers take it upon themselves to support these items with their own income. *Dr. Willett responded that he always encourages the staff to let him know what they need. He does not want them spending money out of pocket. Sometimes teachers want to innovate and do spend money to do so but the basics should be covered.* Ms. Falusi added that programs provide efficiencies for the teachers. If a program is helping to identify an issue and it is taken away then a teacher needs to take time to do their own research.
- Ms. Nuccio inquired about tech services.
- A brief discussion regarding last year's spike in the travel and conferences line item took place.
- Ms. Nuccio requested further information on the interdistrict summary (magnets and charters).
- A discussion regarding the Birch Grove security guard took place in regard to if the salary is being paid by the state. Ms. Philbin will seek clarification
- A brief discussion regarding the state's contributions to teacher pension and retirements took place as something to remain cognizant about.
- A brief discussion regarding the reduction in the tutoring line item took place.

#### 6. **Adjournment**

Mr. Jones motioned to adjourn the meeting at 9:59 p.m. Ms. Nuccio seconded the motion. All were in favor. Motion carried.

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Tammy Nuccio, Council Chair

Lisa A. Pascuzzi  
Clerk