

Budget questions and responses

CC/BOE Ad Hoc meeting #1 Forwarded by Mr. DeLucia

1. What has the SOS (Superintendent of Schools) done to investigate an early retirement incentive program to reduce top-step staff in favor of newer teachers?

- This strategy was offered in the past. We have forwarded legal counsel a draft of the 2015 draft/executed MOU for his input.
- From what I understand, in the past incentive was pleasing to some top step teachers who were happy to move into retirement a year or two earlier but the savings were not as predicted (50K) because they were unable to replace the top step retirees with first step teachers as predicted.
- We can certainly do a projection of savings and approach the union with a MOU if that is the will of the BOE.
- There are 116 top step (step 13) teachers. If a few (eligible for retirement and chose this option) were replaced with first step teachers, there may be savings but keep in mind that we would be losing a wealth of experience in our veteran teachers retiring earlier than expected.

For your reference, here is the contractual salary scale:

2019-2020 Teacher Salary Schedule				
STEP	BA	MA	6 th Year	PHD
1	\$48,918	\$50,827	\$53,184	\$57,140
2	\$50,363	\$52,502	\$54,977	\$59,066
3	\$51,954	\$54,185	\$56,883	\$61,112
4	\$53,016	\$56,208	\$58,903	\$63,283
5	\$54,185	\$58,232	\$60,925	\$65,455
6	\$56,208	\$60,255	\$63,117	\$67,810
7	\$57,894	\$62,275	\$65,308	\$70,163
8	\$60,922	\$65,671	\$68,462	\$75,980
9	\$63,954	\$69,068	\$71,609	\$78,982
10	\$67,907	\$73,630	\$76,493	\$82,130
11	\$71,737	\$77,550	\$80,324	\$84,570
12	\$76,440	\$82,355	\$85,113	\$88,693
13	\$82,321	\$88,425	\$91,206	\$94,163

The formula to retire in CT is based on age and years of service. Although we have 116 teachers at top step, most are not at the desired age and service levels. Benefits begin when you are age 55 with 20 years of service (receiving 28% of salary), age 50 with 25 years of service (receiving 25% of salary) or age 60 with 10 years of service (10%).

Taking all of this into consideration, here is a rough projection... if we project 10 teachers to take a retirement incentive this is the projection:

- 10 teachers paid at MA of \$88,425 offered the incentive would be a cost of approximately \$60,000-\$100,000 (depending on the incentive offered).
- If all 10 were replaced by first step teachers the savings would be \$39,507 per teacher or \$395,070 (minus the 60K-100K) would be \$295,070-\$335,070.

2. What has the SOS done to encourage hiring new teachers at lower steps and degree scales?

- As I explained at the City Goals session, we have a **great deal of difficulty** attracting and retaining highly qualified and certified teachers especially in hard to fill areas (Math, Science, Music, World Language, Speech/Language, EL, Preschool Special Education, Special Education, etc.). In those areas we are hiring top step with degrees in order to get a certified teacher.
- We hire the most qualified teacher for the position. If there are two candidates, equally qualified, we certainly hire the lower cost employee.

3. What has the SOS done to limit the hiring of new teaching staff to those on step-6 or less, regardless of salary lane placement?

- See above

4. What has the SOS done to transition NPS to becoming a new-teacher mentorship focused district?

- All districts in the state are involved in the new teacher mentorship program.
- Here is the link for the TEAM Teacher Education and Mentoring Program <https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/TEAM/Teacher-Education-And-Mentoring-TEAM-Program>

5. What has the SOS done to investigate the take-over of the Sachem Program at NFA to reduce those costs to Norwich?

- This concept has never been discussed with the SOS by anyone.
- How specifically would a Norwich Public Schools takeover of an NFA program save costs for the City of Norwich?
- This concept has never been broached with me by NFA or any of its leaders. Is there any indication that NFA no longer wants to run their own Sachem program?
- Where would this program be held? We have no room in any NPS school and it would be problematic to run a program on the NFA campus.
- We are a PK-8 School Department. We have no high school programs and our teachers and staff have focused expertise and certification in PK-8, not high school.
- This concept is not currently being explored.

6. Specifically, how will a Transportation Coordinator save budget dollars for the district?

- If we had a NPS transportation coordinator they would be the agent for NPS where transportation is concerned and would be reviewing everything with the best interest of the school department in mind. All other transportation employees work directly for the transportation company and they would likely have the best interest of the transportation company in mind. The Preston School Department has a full time transportation coordinator, FYI.
- Our transportation coordinator would focus on student safety, making student ride times shorter, consolidating transportation runs and focus on reduction of bus fleet (in Norwich and out of district runs).
- The transportation coordinator could begin a pilot program with other regional districts to transport out of district special education students together on one

bus to out of district programs for a reduced rate in a shared services design. We would save money and they would pay in because they would be saving money.

- If the transportation coordinator does not create savings up to and hopefully in excess of their salary the BOE can always discontinue the position. It would be an expectation of the position.
- The transportation line items in the budget that have the potential to be reduced are:

Budget Line Item	Budgeted 19/20	Add'l needed 20/21	Notes
53333 Transportation	\$4,127,654.00	\$165,106.00	The budget line would decrease due to finding efficiencies and eliminate bus runs
55510 Special Ed Transportation	\$4,000,000.00	\$500,000.00	The budget line would decrease due to finding efficiencies to eliminate bus runs and working with other towns to bring in revenue to run a single regional bus to an out of district placement

- As you can see, an investment of \$85,000 gives us the opportunity to reduce line items that are projected (at current actuals) to increase \$665,106.00. Clearly a good idea.

7. Specifically, how will an Assistant for Special Ed save budget dollars for the district?

- Optimally, most districts our size not only have an Assistant Special Education Director but also someone in charge of RtI (Response to Intervention) and even someone in charge of 504 plans (a 504 coordinator). We have none of those positions. The coordination of all programs in Norwich is left solely to the Special Education Director.
- The goal of the Assistant Special Education Director will be to assist in making the special education program in the Norwich Public the best it could possibly be.
- The employee would help ensure that all programs are operating lawfully (which would continue to save money in legal bills and conflict resolution about individualized programs and plans).
- The employee would be able to pilot specialized programs for unique learners in the district and for students who are currently in out of district placements. Parents want their students in their local schools with siblings and neighbors. If we were able to move some students into in-district programs the district would save on out of district transportation and tuition costs and our students would be in local high quality programs.
- Additionally, the employee will be able to make adjustments to our existing NPS programs to see if there are opportunities to make program enhancements and

efficiencies. Moving to a more least restrictive environment will require more training and will reduce staff at a savings to the district.

- The budget line items that have the potential to be reduced are:

Line Item	Budget 19/20	Add'l needed 20/21	Notes
Certified Salaries	\$18,502,487.00	\$1,053,931.31	Find efficiencies to reduce staff
Non Cert Salaries	\$7,123,678.45	\$1,195,480.49	Find efficiencies to reduce staff
Health Insurance	\$4,705,097.00	\$1,186,011.00	Reductions in personnel would reduce this line item as well
Sp Ed Contract Svs	\$1,472,000.00	NA	Refinements in programming could reduce this line item
Sp Ed Transportation	\$4,000,000.00	\$500,000.00	Bringing students back from OOD would reduce this line item
Tuition (which includes OOD)	\$34,112,850.00	\$1,106,315.00	Bringing students back from OOD would reduce this line item

8. Specifically, how will reduced responsibilities of existing admin staff, due to new admin positions in Central Office save budget dollars for the district?

- Answered in #6 & 7
- Central office personnel are operating at capacity and well beyond capacity. In order to realize these savings we will need to hire additional staff.

9. How does hiring an admin-level HR director demonstrate fiscal restraint over placing an HR clerk in City Hall under the supervision of the city's existing Director of HR?

- We reached out to the City and asked about shared services and The Norwich Public Schools have approximately 900 employees and the HR Department was run by only one clerk (without specialized HR training or experience).
- The City of Norwich absent NPU and the Police Department have approximately 200-300 employees managed by four employees in the City HR Department (Director, Assistant Director, Retirement Plan Administrator and HR Assistant).
- The job functions of a school district HR department are germane to schools (teacher certification, teacher tenure, training in accordance with the CT

Department of Education, retiree benefits outside of the city (State Teacher Retirement) etc.) it would be inappropriate and ineffective to merge the city and schools HR Departments. It would also be making the assumption that the City had excess capacity now (and not running efficiently) to be able to absorb 900 extra employees and I do not think that is a fair assumption.

- We were in significant need of a HR Director as confirmed and underscored by the auditor. Human Resources in schools is very complicated (hiring, certification, the discharge of sick and discharge of personal days, overtime, on-boarding and training, keeping track of annual training, maintaining an employee database and a position list, benefits, retiree benefits, etc.) for over 900 employees. While the clerk was doing a wonderful job at processing information, we had no one who was building HR systems, building an accurate FTE (full time equivalent) database, scrutinizing procedures and who is watching over and managing our Human Resources Department as a whole from a legal and administrative perspective.
- While there are some areas of the schools and city that should be explored for shared service opportunities (maintenance, physical plant, buildings and ground, after school care, etc.) HR and Payroll are not appropriate areas.
- Please know that I have approached the City to ask about the option of shared service in some of the aforementioned areas.

10. How does hiring an admin-level Payroll manager demonstrate fiscal restraint over placing a payroll clerk in City Hall under the supervision of the city's Comptroller?

- Again, while there are some areas of the schools and city that should be explored for shared service options (maintenance, physical plant, buildings and ground, after school care, etc.) HR and Payroll are not appropriate areas for us to merge.
- Please know that I have approached the City to ask about the option of shared service in some of the aforementioned areas.
- We historically had 2 payroll clerks and one clerk abruptly resigned (giving us less than 2 weeks notice). In order to ensure that payroll for the entire school department we had to act fast and hire a replacement.
- In the past, the 2 payroll clerks consistently worked overtime and earned overtime pay. Any attempts at reducing overtime led to errors in payroll due to an over abundance of work that could not be done by just 2 clerks without error.
- Over the past 11 years 5 clerks have quit. Over the past 11 years we have also had to supplement with temps who were brought in to assist payroll (in addition to the overtime)
- We replaced the clerk who resigned with a payroll manager and used the budget savings from the elimination of overtime for 2 employees and the additional temporary employees to fill the salary gap between the clerk and the manager thus making the position cost neutral but more effective and efficient. Ideally we really need 3 employees in payroll but we are being very fiscally conservative and trying to make do with 2 employees in this department.