

The Board of Education

Town of Brooklyn
119 Gorman Road
Brooklyn, CT 06234

Mae Lyons, Board Chair
Keith Atchinson, Secretary
Tana Jolley

Melissa Perkins-Banas, Vice-Chair
Justin Phaiah
Carolyn Hackbarth

Mission: The Brooklyn Schools will foster a drive for learning within each student to reach his/her greatest potential. To achieve this mission, the school will continually improve its educational programs and services to meet this community's expectations for a quality education for all.

The Brooklyn Board of Education held a virtual budget workshop on April 22, 2020. In attendance were Mrs. Lyons, Mrs. Perkins-Banas, Mr. Atchinson, Mr. Phaiah, Mrs. Jolley and Mrs. Hackbarth.

Also in attendance were Mrs. Buell, Superintendent, Mr. Otter, Board of Finance, and Stephanie Levin, Business Manager.

1. Attendance, Establishment of a Quorum, Call to Order

Mrs. Lyons called the meeting to order at 6:10 p.m.

Mrs. Buell stated that each member will introduce themselves and their title since the meeting was being held by video on Zoom and being broadcast live on Facebook.

2. Public Comment:

Questions and comments are by phone: (860)774-9732 x1.

Mrs. Lyons stated that we would ask that you state your name and address for the record and direct your comments to the Board of Education. The Board of Education is not permitted to engage in a discussion or answer questions during public comment, but welcome you to share your thoughts or questions. Five minutes may be allotted to each speaker and a maximum of 20 minutes.

Mrs. Buell read an email comment from Jessica Solis of 22 Juniper way, Brooklyn, in regards to the 3 year old preschool program. She was present at the March 11, 2020 meeting and listened as all options that were weighed. When she left the meeting, she felt that the Board had heard the public's suggestions. They discussed paying for preschool and changing the number of days for preschoolers. There was also discussion about

removing the 3 year olds, but Mrs. Buell discussed challenges it would bring and the school would still need to provide for 3 year olds with an IEP. Mrs. Solis mentioned she left the meeting feeling confident that the 3 year old preschool would be left intact, but maybe restructured. She was shocked when she listened to the April 8, 2020 meeting and it was discussed and the Board members stated it was almost decided to cut the 3 year old preschool program. As a mom, she urges the Board to reconsider. She's had two children that went through two years of preschool and they grew tremendously after having continuity and feels it helped with their academic success. She thinks it's a disadvantage for 4 year olds to be ready to learn knowledge of what is expected when they haven't learned the basics of school. She respects the Board for what they do and this year brings challenges never seen before on a budget that taxpayers don't even get to vote on or against. The 3 year old preschool program has always been a source of pride to this town and the reason why people sought out the Brooklyn school system. She suggested that maybe the 3 year old preschool program could be offered as a paid option. She thanked the Board for all that they do and stated she has confidence they will explore all options.

Mrs. Buell stated there were some general email questions she received and were posted to the website in regards to any potential savings in result to the closure during this covid process. Mrs. Buell has responded to the emails. She stated there are some potential savings, not all.

Mr. Otto asked if Mrs. Buell has additional savings, is she ready to give an estimate on what the cash savings might be returned to the town? Mrs. Buell stated that the Business Manager and she have looked at it and they are working on it. She doesn't have a number yet. Mr. Otto stated he understands it's difficult to come up with a number this far away.

Mrs. Buell stated there are no additional email or phone comments.

3. Budget Discussion

Mrs. Buell stated that all budget documents will be posted on the Brooklyn Schools website at www.brooklynschools.org as well as the Town of Brooklyn website at www.brooklynct.org. Anyone that has comments or questions about the budget to email budgetquestions@brooklynschools.org. Budget questions and answers will be posted to the Brooklyn Schools website as well.

Mrs. Buell stated the current budget document didn't change from the April 8, 2020 meeting due to the Board not approving any reductions in that meeting. The BOE Proposed Estimate of Expenditures from the April 8, 2020 Budget Workshop is \$19,726,712, which is an increase of \$1,063,944 or 5.7% increase over the 2019-2020 budget.

Mrs. Buell stated that at the April 8, 2020 budget workshop, they had discussed some possible reductions from the items for consideration list, item numbers 26 through 32. Mrs Buell reviewed. the item numbers 26 through 32 with the Board. Mrs. Buell stated

that if those reductions are taken, it will bring the budget down to an increase of \$903,642 or 4.8% increase. She stated it's estimated to be approximately a 1.6 mill increase just for the Board of Education side. Mrs Buell stated that she had a conversation with the First Selectmen and he stated a mill is approximately \$560,000. She stated that item numbers 26 through 32 have been discussed and feels the Board is in agreement with those reductions.

Mrs. Buell discussed item number 33, insurance. She stated she had an insurance meeting today, CT-CHIP meeting. She stated that she has spoken with the insurance broker and other superintendents and they agreed that they need to put some pressure on the insurance brokers to see if they can ask for some concessions. The cost of insurance is projected to be a 19.5% increase. If we ask for a concession, the insurance company may or may not give it. If the insurance company were to give us a concession, it would reduce our increase. The outcome was that they have asked their insurance brokers to ask Cigna for a concession. Mrs. Buell believes the Board should take the risk in reducing the insurance by \$76,292 or a 0.5% reduction instead of cutting a preschool teacher. The mill rate won't be set until June and the next insurance meeting is May 6, 2020 where the Board will still have time to come back.

Mrs. Buell discussed item number 34, potential retirement. It hasn't been determined, but feels that a \$28,331 reduction is a safe risk to make.

Mrs. Buell discussed item number 35, audit services and item number 36, instructional/professional services. She stated that she shouldn't be needing to spend as much next year as she had this year on audit services. She budgeted conservatively and the \$5,000 reduction is a reasonable reduction to make. The reduction in instructional/professional services is another reasonable reduction to take at \$5,000.

She would like the BOE to consider the reduction items 25 through 36. Taking these reductions would bring our increase down to \$789,019 or 4.2% increase. She wanted to remind the Board that insurance costs, \$385,600 increase, and high school tuition, \$418,800 increase, totalling \$804,400 increase, which is money they have no control over. This needs to be funded and if they take the above reductions they've already gone below the uncontrolled costs.

Mr. Otto wanted to encourage the Board to work as hard as they can to reduce the budget even more than the amount they are talking about. He stated that government officials and many towns, especially in eastern Connecticut, are beginning to get very concerned that the economic effects of this virus situation, may result in substantial numbers of taxpayers not paying their property taxes next year. He stated a shortfall in revenue can really hurt us. He asks the Board to be as conservative as they can and reduce as much as possible. He would like to see them do something to increase the scores of our students, but doesn't think this is the year to do it. He also wanted to point out that the value of a mill is \$572,200, slightly more than what is on the budget documents.

Mr. Atchinson asked about the potential retirement on how sure she was it would happen. Mrs. Buell stated that there is a potential.

Mrs. Buell stated that the next insurance meeting is May 6, 2020, which is the same date that the Board of Education is presenting the school's budget to the Board of Finance. If the insurance company offers a concession higher than the 0.5%, our numbers will look very different and she should know that on May 6, 2020.

Mrs. Hackbarth had a question on the insurance. Are we only able to use the current insurance company and is there no insurance shopping to be done? Mrs. Buell stated that this is our first year being in a consortium. We went out to bid with a group consisting of 5 out of 6 other communities and entered in with a very positive number. The group decided not to go out to bid. There happened to be very high claims in multiple towns, Brooklyn included. Mrs. Lyons stated we did save money last year, it's just coming back this year.

Mrs. Lyons asked about whether cutting preschool is not Mrs Buell's first choice and takes precedence over instructional coaches and social workers. Mrs. Buell stated that the new positions are not going to be funded, they've already made that decision. If the insurance company gives the 0.5% concession, it'll save a preschool teacher. There will still be adjustments made to the preschool program, we're still improving the program without cutting the teacher and still servicing the same number of students.

Mr. Atchinson thinks the parent who wrote in had a good option about paying for 3 year olds. With Mr. Otto's comments about trying to be as conservative as possible, do we need to try and cut more from here or leave the budget as is and see what the Board of Finance says? Mrs. Lyons stated it could get sent back to the Board. Mrs. Perkins-Banas asked where do we cut? The administrators have prioritized and they've cut the budget as much as they could.

Mrs. Buell stated that the reserve fund with the town is lower than what the board of finance thought it would be. She understands their concerns. She stated the school is still going to be getting our grants. State officials have already stated the budget for the grants in education will not be changing for this coming year.

There was discussion by the Board in regards to the library media specialists and the instructional coach and social workers. Mrs. Buell stated that the library media specialists have already been cut and their positions will be reassigned and a social worker is being added and an instructional coach is being added. The Board does agree that the social worker will be needed for students that return to school dysregulated and they may need intervention that they didn't need previously. Mrs Buell stated that we do value our library media specialists. She knows that the community and employees are hurt by losing the library media specialists, it's not personal and not a decision based on one person. It's a decision based on the needs in our classrooms and schools.

Mr. Atchinson agreed with what Mrs. Buell stated that the Board does value the library media specialists. There are tough choices that have to be made and probably more will have to be made after the Board of Finance hears it too.

Mrs. Hackbarth agrees with administrators having a preference of having a social worker and having an instructional coach in lieu of the library media specialist. She supports that. Mr. Phaiiah and Mrs. Jolley both agree as well.

Mrs. Lyons asked the other members if they agree in leaving the 3 year old preschool program intact. There was discussion about the possibility of paying, but there are families that can't afford to pay. Mrs. Buell stated the majority of preschool students are 4 year olds. Preschool and kindergarten registration continues through next week. Mrs. Buell stated that she doesn't know how many parents would want to send their 3 year olds in the fall due to the virus.

A motion was made to accept items 26 through 36 on the items for consideration list to bring the budget increase down to \$789,019 or 4.2% increase.

(Perkins-Banas/Atchinson)

No Discussion, unanimous vote to approve

4. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 6:58p.m.

(Perkins-Banas/Jolley)

No discussion, unanimous vote to approve