



STATE OF CONNECTICUT – COUNTY OF TOLLAND  
INCORPORATED 1786

# TOWN OF ELLINGTON

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## BOARD OF FINANCE

JOHN P. RACHEK  
Chairman

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DOUGLAS B. HARDING  
DAVID J. OLENDER  
BARRY C. PINTO  
MICHAEL D. VARNEY

### BUDGET HEARING MARCH 20, 2018 MINUTES

**Members Present:** J. Rachek-Chairman, P. Busse, D. Harding, B. Pinto

**Members Absent:** D. Olender, M. Varney

**Others Present:** L. Spielman-First Selectman, N. DiCorleto-Finance Officer, Dr. S. Nicol-Superintendent of Schools, B. Greenleaf-Dir Fin & Opers BOE, T. Kiff-Judson-BOE Chair, G. Blanchette-BOE, R. Butler-BOE Dir. of Facilities, School Administrators and Principals, JI Reporter

#### Call to Order

Chairman John Rachek opened the hearing at 7:32 PM.

#### Presentation of Board of Education Budget FY 2018-19

Dr. Nicol presented the budget. This budget looks past the next school year and takes into account the next 10-15 years and what the Ellington Public Schools will look like. The vision, mission and core beliefs and values were reset. The mission takes into account the culture of learning. All students have opportunities to make choices and find their passion in life and will know who they are as a learner and person. The opportunities given to them in their K-12 learning will help them with that. The budget takes into account growth and investment. The maintenance of effort portion of the budget has three themes – stem opportunities that are about problem solving, innovative community partnerships, and educating the whole child including social and emotional development.

Challenges and opportunities: Challenges are the pressures on schools in Connecticut that include school choice, unfunded mandates, complex classrooms and parent advocacy. Unique to Ellington is the growth and investment gap. There are 2,683 students currently in the system, 21% diversity (at Windermere 1 out of 3 children is a minority), 2% English language learners, 12.2% special education rate, 10.3% are qualifying for free or reduced lunches. These things

make the classrooms very complex. The population change in Ellington is a +4.42% whereas the regional change in population is a negative percent. Ellington's per pupil expenditure is lower than the region and Ellington has had declining budget increases each year. The funding for the district will become unsustainable in the future if the funding is not addressed. Ms. Busse asked if they have looked into whether the increase correlates with the general population increase. Mr. Nicol stated that they have not looked at it that extensively, but it might be interesting to research.

The population trend is positive with the growth in condos and apartments at +33%. The projected enrollment increase is in kindergarten. Grade 1 at Windermere will be 234 students. An additional kindergarten teacher was hired this year for Windermere that was not budgeted for. Unfunded mandates are being addressed through several opportunities. The program in the town center is running in the black and they will be using some of those funds to offset some of this budget. Ellington has been able to bring kids from other towns into this program and they pay Ellington. This program, which includes emotionally disturbed children, is State Certified which is very hard to do because of strict guidelines. This program is good for the pupils, the town and is financially beneficial.

Ellington has 19 new seats in the Hartford School Choice program in preschool and kindergarten which has created additional revenue. Those children brought into the system early will probably stay in the system all the way through to 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Partnerships with outside organizations have helped Ellington such as the UCONN EMT early college program. This is live experience and is a college credited program and requires little to no funding from the Ellington.

This budget projects the new ECS formula established in 17-18 and the Board of Education feels that this year will be more stable in terms of the State budget due to the fact that it is an election year. The worst case scenario would be the Governor's budget. There are new positions in this budget that have been in the works for several years. There are positions from last year's budget that were not filled and are in this budget. This budget uses the Governor's budget figures of \$38,301,361; the overall budget increase is 3.88% as adopted by the Board of Education.

This budget has reduced special education costs due to the non-lapsing account they are working on now. State statute allows 1% of the budget to be put into this account and can be carried over each year. This has to be agreed upon by the Town. Dental costs have been reduced due to self-insurance in cooperation with the town. Health care shows a 7% premium increase and a collaborative on diesel fuel is anticipated.

This budget eliminates the security specialist position and adds a security officer and school resource officer. The Officer to be hired will be located at the high school and have law enforcement qualifications. A \$90,000 grant was received for this last year for these positions which will not be available in the future and this cost been rolled into the budget.

The major drivers are salary and benefits of 83% of the increase; maintenance of effort and maintenance services 3.27% which maintains current programs and services, growth and investment of .6%, outside tuition costs for special education outplacement, technology and operations is primarily the bus contract and chrome books.

Long term investments include a kindergarten teacher, a 10 month asst. principal position, technology and computer science teacher to offer Robotics II, unassigned elementary teacher and 2 full day preschool classes that are budget neutral. An athletic director and health director are included.

The Outside Tuition account is being reduced by the non-lapsing account and special needs children that are being serviced by the District are on the increase. Ellington has no control over the magnet schools and special education costs. A family that requires outplacement could move into the Town tomorrow. The salary account has a lower number of retirements than in some past years. Funding in the non-lapsing account will come from financial penalties received resulting from a vendor non-compliance issue and has helped to lower the increase in the budget. The retirement account is lower than it has been in years; therefore fewer new teachers are anticipated to be hired at lower rates. John Rachek asked why the retirement account increased. Mr. Greenleaf stated it could be long term subs and adjustment for leaving in the middle of salary negotiations, etc. The Retirement Adjustment account is also included in the figure. Ms. Busse stated that a recent trend is to penalize for spousal eligibility. Mr. Greenleaf stated that there is no penalty in the insurance program. Self-insurance for dental is budgeted at \$25,000. Each year more and more bargaining units are being moved to high deductible programs. Claims have been trending up and premiums are tight. Ms. Busse asked if the claims are due to the older employees not retiring. Dr. Nicol stated he did not believe so and that there were some significant health issues in the district this year.

A FICA alternative program is being implemented to save money. Instead of the employer paying, the employee pays through a pretax vehicle. The Workers Compensation is done in conjunction with the Town through CIRMA.

Electricity shows no savings yet for solar on Center School. Dr. Nicol stated that it will take several more years to see savings. They are still trying to get a handle on Crystal Lake School usage. Ms. Spielman asked if he would recommend solar on other buildings and he responded that he feels a solar field with the raised cap removed by State makes more sense than putting panels on buildings.

Transportation contract is in year 2 of 5 and shows a 7.5% increase in rates. Ms. Busse stated that lots of kids are being transported by their parents. She asked if money could be saved if those parents could sign away their bus service. Dr. Nicol was not aware of this. The number of busses would probably have to be the same because it would depend on were the kids that signed off lived. He will look into it. CREC provides transportation for Hartford choice.

Student to chrome books ratio program costs \$34,000 per year and in year 4 it will level off and not be an increased budget. There is a large list of complex software that needs to be in use for security.

Mr. Rachek asked if the BOE is separate from the town for health insurance. Dr. Nicol stated that this is determined by each bargaining unit. Mr. Greenleaf stated that it would make sense to bring the groups together and he would speak to Nick about the future of that.

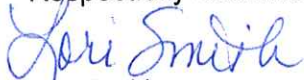
Ms. Busse asked if the substitute teacher's budget was for daily or long term. Mr. Greenleaf did not have that figure but would get those to her.

Mr. Rachek asked how accurate they felt the company predicting the increased growth in population in students was and what if the growth does not materialize. Dr. Nicol stated that the district is thinly staffed now and if it did not materialize, it would not affect the district. Through the Town's Facilities Study, another firm will be brought in to project the town's population. The further into the future they look, the harder it is to be accurate, but they capture the general trend.

Dr. Nicol stated he would be available to meet with any one of the members of the board with questions or explanations of the budget.

The Chairman closed the hearing at 8:45 PM.

Respectfully submitted:



Lori Smith  
Recording Secretary