

The special meeting for the Public Hearing on the tentative 2015-2016 School Budget of the City of Vineland Board of Education was held Monday, April 27, 2015 at 6:32 p.m. in the Veterans Memorial Intermediate School Auditorium, 424 S. Main Road, Vineland, New Jersey, pursuant to notice with Mr. English presiding and the following members present: Ms. Acosta, Ms. Codispoti, Mr. DeWinne, Mr. DiGiorgio, Mr. Jennings, Ms. Morello, Mr. Pagano and Ms. Rios. Absent: None.

Also present: Dr. Gruccio, Superintendent, Mr. Frey and Mr. Frangipani, Assistant Superintendents, Mrs. Haley, Board Secretary and Mr. Barse, Associate Board Solicitor. Absent: None.

Mr. English announced that in compliance with the New Jersey meeting law commonly referred to as "The Sunshine Law," the Vineland Board of Education has caused notice of this meeting to be sent to the following, announcing time and place thereof, agenda, etc.: The Daily Journal, the Atlantic City Press, The Grapevine, Clerk - City of Vineland, and Administrative Office Public Bulletin Board.

Flag Salute:

Special

Presentations: Mr. English introduced Mrs. Haley, Business Administrator, to present a brief overview of the budget.

Mrs. Haley said on March 4th we presented the 2015-2016 budget for a total of \$196,352,656. She said the budget included a local tax levy of \$22,166,068., which is a 2% increase from the prior year. Mrs. Haley said this tax levy equates to an increase of \$27.06 dollars on the average home assessed at \$159,164 which is on a calendar year basis. She said there are no changes to the budget since the March 4th presentation. Mrs. Haley said the advertised school budget was posted in the official newspapers and a copy is available tonight. She said after the March 4th presentation the next steps were the Board voted on March 11th to submit the tentative fiscal year 2015-2106 budget to the County Executive Superintendent. On March 20th we submitted the budget to the County and on April 17th the approval was received. Mrs. Haley said tonight is our Public Hearing. She said a special meeting will be held on May 6th for the Board to adopt the final budget prior to our regularly scheduled meeting. The purpose of a Public Hearing is to receive public comment on the school district's 2015-2016 budget. Mrs. Haley said she will present some clarifying points before the public addresses the Board. She said clarifying point #1: Computer Teachers. Elementary Computer Teachers are being reassigned to classrooms because technology is infused throughout the curriculum.

Mrs. Haley said we presently have eight computer teachers and one is retiring, two will float around the elementary schools to help with the transition and five will be reinstated to classrooms. Clarifying point #2: Cunningham Alternative School. The Cunningham Alternative School is being closed in order to save \$1.6 million. Mrs. Haley said an alternative program will continue to be offered and we currently have an RFP advertising for a full day program. Our goal is to have a decision by the May 6th Board meeting to award a contract to one of the vendors who submit a proposal. Clarifying point #3: Digital Technology Course. She said Digital Technology was a half year course paired with Financial Literacy. Financial Literacy will now be offered as a full year course paired with lunch or online outside of the daily schedule based on student choice resulting in the elimination of digital technology. Clarifying point #4: Twenty Positions. Although there will be approximately twenty less positions at the middle and high school levels combined, our goal is that no teachers will lose jobs. They will be absorbed through attrition. Clarifying point #5: Courtesy Busing. Although we continue to provide courtesy busing at all levels, except the high school, we are meeting with legislatures to seek funding opportunities to expand courtesy busing for pre-k through twelfth grade. Clarifying point #6: Supplies. Based upon population, each school was allotted \$464.41 per student for supplies and non-salary expenses to be utilized at the principals' discretion. Clarifying point #7: Student Learning. Although our district has often endured cuts and hardships instruction has always been at the forefront of our decisions. Student learning continues to be our priority. Clarifying point #8: Instructional Time. At the elementary school level the teachers teach 320 minutes per day, at the middle school level 247 minutes per day and at the high school level 245 minutes per day. If instructional time increases by 30 minutes at the middle and high school levels, class size will not be impacted. Clarifying point #9: Banked Cap. The available banked cap for the 2015-2016 school year is \$4,067,966. If we were to utilize this permissible amount, the total increase in the local tax levy would be 20.7% versus 2% that is proposed and currently in our budget. Mrs. Haley said we hope that these comments have helped to clarify some concerns.

Mr. English said at this time the meeting will be opened up for public comments. He said there is no time limit but please try to refrain from 20 minute speeches so everyone has a chance to speak.

Public Comments
On 2015-2016
Budget:

Cindy Paterno
Ms. Paterno spoke in support of the computer teachers.

Tanya Bruce

Ms. Bruce spoke in support of the computer teachers.

Jennifer Pilla

Ms. Pilla spoke in support of the computer teachers.

Fay Romanick

Ms. Romanick expressed her concern in regards to the cutting of programs and computer teachers.

Christie Mercado

Ms. Mercado spoke in support of the computer teachers.

Dana Quiles

Ms. Quiles spoke about the loss of the Response to Intervention (RTI) Program at the middle school level. She urged the Board to use the unused cap to raise the funds necessary to save our programs, staff our school appropriately and protect the high standards our students deserve.

Robin Cohen

Ms. Cohen urged the Board to raise the property taxes to provide our children the education to be successful.

Louise DiBiase

Ms. DiBiase spoke in support of the computer teachers.

Michael Resnick

Mr. Resnick spoke in support of the computer teachers.

Steven DeCredico

Mr. DeCredico expressed his concern in regards to the lack of a Digital Tech Program at the high school and spoke in support of it. He also expressed his concern in regards to class size and teaching time. Mr. DeCredico said he thinks that eliminating teaching positions at a level is detrimental to the students. He urged the Board to utilize the unused cap money.

Tara Myerson

Ms. Myerson urged the Board to raise the taxes.

Xavier Cardona

Mr. Cardona expressed his concern in regards to raising the taxes and spoke against doing so.

Reginald Johnston

Mr. Johnston said he has always worked in the private sector. He spoke about the differences of working in the private sector versus public education sector. Mr. Johnston said this is a poor county and he is against taxes being increased. He said children need to understand basic education.

Jeanne Andrews

Ms. Andrews urged the Board not to cut student opportunities/programs and spoke in support of the computer teachers.

John McGee

Mr. McGee expressed his concern in regards to cutting security guards in the high school.

Bob Rush

Mr. Rush spoke in support of Digital Technology and Personal Finance.

Roxanne DeRenzis

Ms. DeRenzis urged the Board not to cut student opportunities/programs and spoke in support of the computer teachers. She also spoke in support of utilizing the unused cap space to raise the necessary funds to maintain programs and staffing.

Harry Meyers

Mr. Meyers spoke in support of the computer teachers and utilizing the unused cap space.

Matt Thomas

Mr. Thomas spoke in support of utilizing the unused cap space to raise the necessary funds to continue our programs

Kim Piccari

Ms. Piccari spoke in support of utilizing the unused cap space and school computer teachers.

Cedrick Holmes

Mr. Holmes said he is here to support the Board in balancing the budget. He said everyone needs to pull together and do what is best for the students even if that means teachers have to teach computers.

Heather Vinick

Ms. Vinick commended the students who spoke. She addressed the Alternative School closing and advocated for her students. Ms. Vinick urged the Board not to cut student programs.

Jennifer Belvett

Ms. Belvett expressed her concern in regards to not hiring replacements for positions and using long term substitutes. She also expressed her concern in regards to online computer courses teaching the children. Ms. Belvett spoke in support of computer classes and digital technology in the classroom. She said as a community we need to focus on positive changes for student academics even if it means raising the taxes. Ms. Belvett said we need to properly fund the academic future of the children of Vineland.

A recess was taken at 8:26 p.m.

The meeting resumed at 8:39 p.m.

Ms. Acosta, Mr. Jennings and Ms. Rios returned to their seat at 8:41 p.m.

Marlene Casazza

Ms. Casazza urged the Board not to cut programs and positions.

Kristi Holt

Ms. Holt spoke in support of the computer teachers.

Terry Bordo

Ms. Bordo spoke in support of the computer teachers.

Patricia Ocasio

Ms. Ocasio spoke in support of the computer teachers. She urged the Board to raise the taxes to keep the staff and programs needed to ensure each student receives a quality education.

Mary Greenfield

Ms. Greenfield urged the Board to raise her taxes to make her community a better community.

Lee Burke

Mr. Burke said we are hearing a lot tonight from the elementary school teachers and he supports the need for technology teachers at the elementary grades.

Mr. Burke said the budget is prepared by the individual principals and their staff then brought to the Superintendent. He said with any decision making you have to be offered options and he does not think all the options have been presented. Mr. Burke said he supports the Board and thanked Mrs. Haley and her staff for the budget presentation. He said he does not support the transportation budget.

Daina Karol

Ms. Karol spoke in support of the computer teachers and urged the Board to please find a way to not cut any teaching positions.

Meghan Greenfield

Ms. Greenfield urged the Board to raise her taxes and use the unused cap to appropriately fund our schools. She also spoke in support of the computer teachers.

Maureen Roche

Ms. Roche spoke in support of the computer teachers.

Maria Negron

Ms. Negron spoke in support of the computer teachers and said we need to support education in every way.

Glenn Muller

Mr. Muller said the Board has a tough job and have to provide a more than adequate education for our children. He read something from the Governor that relates to Vineland. Mr. Muller challenges administration and the Board to unite along with the citizens of Vineland to support the youth of the city by providing generous funding for the staff, resources and programs so our children can achieve their dreams.

Board Member

Comments:

Mr. DiGiorgio thanked the public, students and employees for their input and courage this evening. He personally believes that our elementary school teachers work very hard and already have too much on their plates. However we are forced with complicated complex issues. Mr. DiGiorgio expressed his concern on how we teach computer proficiency and prepare our young students for the future. He has been told that computers and technology make us more efficient. Mr. DiGiorgio said we have top notch teachers and small tax increases may be necessary. He said it is an inevitable reality that tax increases will be experienced on an ongoing basis for many years to come.

Mr. DiGiorgio said he came from the private sector and can relate to what Mr. Johnston said about working in the private sector. He said what he has heard tonight was find the money somewhere, which appears there are only a couple places to find it and one is through raising the taxes. Mr. DiGiorgio said historically he has not supported tax increases. He said raising taxes does not necessarily translate into increased results. Mr. DiGiorgio said 80% of the budget goes to salaries and benefits. He said that he does not want to cut computer teachers, safety and financial literacy. Mr. DiGiorgio said we are faced with some complicated decisions and complex issues. He asked how you make everyone happy. Mr. DiGiorgio said there is one area he does not want to see cut which is safety. He said the elementary teachers work very hard and teach 320 minutes per day. Mr. DiGiorgio said the elementary teachers have probably the more difficult job than any of our other teachers and we have put a lot on their plate. He would like to do whatever he can to keep the elementary computer teachers.

Ms. Acosta thanked everyone for their comments. She said that she has the weight of the world on her shoulders when she thinks about how best to allocate our resources to help every child. Ms. Acosta said she is extremely impressed by the dedication and passion that everyone has expressed tonight. She said she has spoken to many teachers and students. Ms. Acosta said she agrees that the solution is not to keep cutting but we are faced with the fiscal realities. She thanked Mr. Burke for his comments and said we have to start looking at other areas to see if there are any options. Ms. Acosta said we all need to come to certain compromises and figure out how we are going to work together as a group. She said that she is not in agreement with cutting any positions. Ms. Acosta said her biggest concern in regards to raising the taxes are the families who cannot afford an increase, which may lead them to homelessness. She said we need to explore other options.

Mr. DeWinne said the teachers are great and have been great to his children. He said he will do his best to save teaching jobs. Mr. DeWinne said he has been a proponent against administrative costs as far as upper echelon administration. He said many people stated that we should raise taxes and he thinks it is going to happen. Mr. DeWinne said when he served on the Board 2008 through 2011, he expressed concerns when it came to contract in negotiations. He said on record for every 1% it will cost the district one million dollars and if we keep getting flat funded where will the money come from. Mr. DeWinne said the funding stayed flat but the salaries were increased. He said last year the Finance Committee tried to be proactive and attempted to make some cuts that administration disagreed with.

Mr. DeWinne said the Board was overruled by the county and what administration presented was approved. He said this year we took a different approach. Mr. DeWinne said around five months ago at Vineland High School the public spoke out and said that we need to support Dr. Gruccio and let her do her job. Mr. DeWinne said this year it would have been a lot worse if it were not for Mrs. Haley. He said Mrs. Haley went through the budget and flattened out a lot of areas where there were bubbles. Mr. DeWinne said the budget was presented and we agreed with administration and the budget. He said the budget in 1991 was \$49 million dollars and has increased to \$200 million dollars. Mr. DeWinne said he is not sure what has changed. He said outside of Mr. Burke no one else offered a solution except to raise taxes. Mr. DeWinne said all but one person, who asked for a tax increase, was a staff member and he is not sure if we know truly how the public feels. He said we cannot keep expecting and not getting anything in return. Mr. DeWinne said next year will be the year of a lot of cuts. He commended the students who spoke. Mr. DeWinne said the future looks a lot worse than where we are now.

Mr. Jennings said he does not think we can afford cuts to any areas in our district. He said that he supports Dr. Gruccio with the computer teacher cuts. Mr. Jennings said he also supports administration and sees a difference in the district the way things are being handled. He said central administration has not seen a raise in a few years. Mr. Jennings said central administration is held accountable by the Board and they are here to make the hard decisions. He said that he is interested in raising taxes too but is it the answer. Mr. Jennings said he is in favor of raising taxes 4% and possibly saving some of the computer teachers. He said we are working on the sidewalk and transportation issues to get as many students bused as we can. Mr. Jennings said the bottom line is grades and we are here to produce educated students. He is proud of everything our teachers do and he along with his children are products of Vineland Public Schools.

Mr. Pagano thanked everyone who spoke tonight. He said we appreciate what the teachers do every single day. Mr. Pagano said the two students who spoke tonight are perfect examples of the product of this school district. He said central administration had the job of developing a budget with the help of the principals and school administrators. Mr. Pagano said he was most adamant about no one losing a job in the process. He said administration has done a good job in putting together a budget that works for this year with no one losing their job. Mr. Pagano said between the school district, county and city we are looking at a 12 ½ % increase in taxes this year. He thanked Mr. Burke for coming up with a solution and looks forward to speaking to him in the future about transportation.

Mr. Pagano said the budget was put forward by central administration and Dr. Gruccio and the Board supports it. He said in his line of work he has had the opportunity to visit many homes and families. Mr. Pagano said he sees what their home life is like and what they have and do not have. He said last week he took a day off from work and toured the schools to see what was going on in the classrooms. Mr. Pagano said he was amazed at what he saw. He was impressed with first and second graders and what they knew about computers. Mr. Pagano said when he asked the students where they learned to do what they were doing they all responded from their classroom teacher and at home. He said that he fails to see how one class every six days for 30 minutes teaches these children what they know. Mr. Pagano said anyone who teaches in elementary school should be elevated to the level of sainthood because no one can do the jobs they do. He thanked the teachers and administration.

Ms. Morello said it was wonderful to hear everyone's ideas and opinions. She thanked the Finance Committee for making sure the budget process ran smoothly this year. Ms. Morello said she has a difficult time supporting this budget because it is based on a lot of magical thinking such as going to an eight period day, alternative school program, special education student busing, and removing elementary school computer teachers, which she thoroughly disagrees with. She said we do not take blocks with letters on them and put them in front of children and expect them to learn how to read. Ms. Morello said we are here as a Board in service of children. She said every child in Vineland should have the opportunity to have a very thorough and deep education. Ms. Morello said she cannot support the budget in its current configuration. She said we need to have a shift in the way we think and what has to happen for students. Ms. Morello said the building principals recommended to Dr. Gruccio what they felt could be done without. She said if teachers have an issue then there is a disconnect between school level administration and teaching staff.

Ms. Codispoti thanked everyone for coming out tonight. She said that she values the opinion of residents, students and teachers. Ms. Codispoti said she has reached out to teachers and students to get their ideas on the budget. She said the process of the budget is to ensure that every tax dollar is allocated to where it may have the most impact. Ms. Codispoti believes the Superintendent has worked hard with central administration and other supervisors to balance the education of our students. She does not think anyone wants to cut positions but fiscally she thinks we are moving them. Ms. Codispoti said when she ran for the Board her goal was to hold the Superintendent accountable for her actions. Ms. Codispoti said the Superintendent has prepared this budget and she will hold her accountable.

Ms. Rios complimented Mr. DeWinne for his role and his insight on the budget. She said everything that Mr. DeWinne said would happen is taking place. Ms. Rios thanked the teachers, residents and students who spoke tonight. She said we live in a society where there is homelessness and a lot of issues. Ms. Rios said this budget is the principals' recommendation to administration. She said the Superintendent and Administration have heard your concerns and perhaps there is still a chance to see what they can do to save computer teachers. Ms. Rios said on Friday she visited a few elementary schools and was completely impressed with what the second graders were doing. She is still concerned about the Kindergarten and first grade students, which she brought to Mr. Frey's attention. Ms. Rios also visited a computer teacher's class to see what they were doing. She said hopefully Dr. Gruccio can come up with another solution or pursue the avenue that she wishes to pursue.

Mr. English said he is a very passionate, honest person and has broke bread with a lot of the people who are sitting here tonight. Mr. English said his fellow Board members are a passionate bunch that specialize in their own special areas. He said we are blessed to have two Hispanic members on the Board which represent almost 60% of our community. Mr. English said he would like to know how many Hispanics rent versus own their home. He said around 68.2% of the speakers tonight were from Petway School. Mr. English said they spoke very passionately about the computer program and what is being taught in the classroom. He said the job of an elementary teacher has changed since he was a child. Mr. English commended the teachers for the job that they do. He said the computer teacher cuts were in the budget last year and brought back into the mix for this year. Mr. English said no principal at any level wants to make cuts. He said when the principals are told they need to cut something he believes they will cut what least affects the way there building functions or the way the students are educated. Mr. English said the budget process was transparent and a lot of credit goes to Mrs. Haley and her staff. He said the earthquake is coming and we are going to try to make it as painless as possible to be able to deliver that quality of education. Mr. English said he heard a lot tonight about solutions and raising taxes. He said Mr. DeWinne touched on predictions several years back and predicted what was going to happen. He thanked the public for coming out tonight. Mr. English said that he believes central administration together with Mrs. Haley, accounting Department and each Principal have given this district a balanced budget that should be supported by this Board. He thanked everyone for their time.

Mr. English thanked Ms. Nicolosi, who was in the audience, for coming. He also thanked each Board Member for passionately speaking tonight.

Adjournment: A motion was made by Ms. Rios, seconded by Ms. Morello, to adjourn the meeting at 10:24 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Helen G. Haley
Board Secretary

HGH:df

