

**Preston Board of Finance
Special Meeting
Thursday, April 14, 2022
Cafeteria - Preston Plains Middle School**

Call to Order - John Moulson called the meeting to order at 7:30 P.M.

1. Roll Call

Members

Alternates

John Moulson - Chairman

Robert Congdon - V. Chairman - excused

Stacey Becker - excused

Denise Beale

Andy Depta

Zachary Maurice - excused

Andrew Sawyer - seated for Stacey Becker

Kayla Thompson - Clerk - seated for Zach Maurice

Also Present

Cindy Varricchio - Finance Director

Roy Seitsinger - Superintendent of Schools

15 members of the public were present

2. Public Comment

Courtney Ennis, 95 Miller Road, stated that she felt there should be no cuts to the pre-school program or the LA program. She feels that Preston doesn't do the bare minimum it's not what is best for the town.

Nicole Breen, 159 Branch Hill Road, stated with the recent pandemic and isolation of students from their peers it's imperative that programs that support interaction with others like the preschool; program be sustained to nurture children's growth in social skills.

3. Review Board of Education Budget

Roy Seitsinger stated that the main focus of the budget was based on the validation of students' needs. That the needs of all the students in Preston are by far the most important. He then pointed out that 98% of the budget is driven by 4 categories - Salaries, Health Care, Special Education, and High School Tuition all of which the Board of Education has no control over.

As the school moves forward it is to Restore and Revitalize the programs and offerings at Preston schools. We need to acknowledge that Technology is Mission Critical pre-COVID there were 400 computers for student and staff use now there are 1,200! Those computers need to

be maintained, upgraded, and replaced as time goes on to ensure equitability for our students and families in this community.

Students' wellness is essential to ensure that we need to reconnect with community partners. The Recovery from the past several years will be done by supporting students, families, and staff. The federal funds that we have received will be used to allow us to thrive beyond the basics.

Preston has:

- 439 students
- 184 high school students in 8 high schools

Of those students:

- 10% have a 504 (44)
- 20% have an IEP (86)
- 33% have free and reduced lunch
- 16% BIPOC students

There are over 400 state and federal mandates that must be adhered to in order to receive state and federal funds to subsidize the programs offered at Preston schools.

The Board of Education was able to make reductions in their budget to flatten the budget. Reductions totaled \$499,000. One area that was reduced was Transportation. It was felt with the newer buses that were more fuel-efficient that a reduction was warranted.

Dr. Seitsinger then explained the influx of recent federal funds. He stated that they will eventually go away over the next few years and that the spending of all funds needs to be approved by the state and that any changes to the approved planned spending need to also be approved before the money is spent. The federal funds received *must* supplement school programs. He then shared a chart showing how funds were being spent.

Grant Adjusted Costs

Summer School	100% ESSER	Funded
Social Worker	60% ESSER	Funded
PreK	33% ESSER	Funded
Technology	ESSER Funds and State Funds	

It was stated that PreK to Grade 2 has been substantially disrupted by the pandemic of the last 3 years. They are in need of a solid foundation if they are to grow and thrive in the future. We also need to figure out and budget for maintaining, repairing, and eventually replacing future technology needs.

Finally, it was reviewed that psychologists, social workers, and school nurses have very different roles, degrees, and certifications, and they work together to provide support to not just the students of the schools but the families and staff as well. Their role is essential to the well-being of the school communities.

The Board of Finance had the following questions:

Andy Depta clarified that the Board of Finance doesn't reduce any particular line item for the Board of Education's budget. It was stated that was correct the Board of Finance cuts a % and it's up to the Board of Education to decide where those cuts are made.

Kayla Thompson asked how they collect the numbers for the PreK program. It was stated that last year during PreK screening parents thought they were registering so there was confusion. This year we have worked more aggressively to make the process clear to parents the registration process. There are 3- PreK, 3 -Kindergarten, and 2 - First grades at the present time.

Andrew Sawyer questioned the reduction in Special Education. It was stated that more services will be done locally and rather than anticipate costs they will be dealt with as they come.

There was a clarification of staff increase that in August a staff member was added due to enrollment increases. That staff member will continue so, therefore, there is no increase in staff over this year. Dr. Seitsinger also pointed out that moving staff isn't always simple it depends on their certification.

Denise Beale asked if the parents paid for PreK. It was stated that they do pay on a sliding scale. That along with local, state, and federal funding supports the program.

Denise Beale stated that last year the school's budget was reduced and wanted to know how they made out. It was stated that it was difficult, but that any reduction this year would come from programs or supplies.

Andy Depta stated that he has looked through the curriculum and doesn't see any curriculum for Social-Emotional Growth. It was stated that there is no curriculum that it's integrated into every aspect of the school day. That teacher and staff are trained to support students as soon as they cross the threshold of the classroom.

Kayla Thompson questioned how high school tuitions were dealt with. It was explained that some high schools bill the town for the school year just ended, and some schools bill for the present year. Some high schools are subsidized so those tuitions are much lower. The present 8th graders have already declared their intentions and it's been calculated the costs according to the present information, but students can change their minds. It was also pointed out that this years' 8th grade has 49 students but the present 7th grade has 40 so there will be a savings next year just because of the fluctuation in numbers.

Staffing costs were discussed next. It was pointed out that the average salary is \$80,000 and that there are no retirements on the horizon. Many of the staff are simply not eligible.

Kayla Thompson read into the record a letter from Zachary Maurice who was unable to attend tonight's meeting.

Zachary Maurice recommended that the Board of Finance pass the Board of Education budget as presented. It was worked on with diligence and consideration and it's important not to take valuable resources away from the students.

4. Public Comment -

Andy Depta clarified that Zach Maurice is the Board of Finance liaison to the Board of Education.

5. Adjournment -

Andy Depta motioned to adjourn at 8:45 P.M. Kayla Thompson seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kimberly Lang

Recording Secretary