

MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF SCHOOL ESTIMATE
PUBLIC BUDGET HEARING AND
BUDGET WORKSHOP
HELD MONDAY, MARCH 24, 2008 AT 7:30 P.M.
GLENFIELD SCHOOL, 25 MAPLE AVENUE
MONTCLAIR, NEW JERSEY

I. The meeting was opened at 7:45 p.m. and the following statement was read:

Let the minutes reflect that adequate notice of this meeting has been provided in the following manner:

1. On March 18, 2008 notice of this meeting was faxed to the Montclair Times, the Herald and News and the Star-Ledger. The time, date and location of this meeting were accurately set forth therein.

2. On this same date a copy of said notice was filed with the Township Clerk and was posted at the public bulletin board in the first floor main hall of the Board of Education building, 22 Valley Road.

3. Copies have also been mailed to all persons who have requested same at no cost.

II. The Pledge of Allegiance occurred at 7:46 p.m.

III. ROLL CALL OF THE BOARD

	Present	Absent
Ed Remsen	<u> X </u>	<u> </u>
Jerold Freier	<u> </u>	<u> X </u>
Gerald Tobin	<u> X </u>	<u> </u>
Shelly Lombard	<u> X </u>	<u> </u>
Timothy Barr	<u> </u>	<u> X </u>
Staff Members Present	20	
Members of the Public	150	
Members of the Press	1	

Mayor Remsen stated that the Board of School Estimate will not vote on the budget Tuesday, March 25. He stated that they will hear testimony from members of the public, consider any changes and carefully review the 2008-2009 operating and capital budgets prior to voting.

IV. Presentation of the 2008-2009 Budget, Dr. Alvarez and Mrs. Sullivan

Dr. Alvarez welcomed everyone to the budget presentation and thanked them for their interest in the budget. He stated that the budget has been reduced through efficiencies and consolidation of services to an overall budget increase of 4.7% or a 5.6% tax increase, down from the 7.2% original increase. Dr. Alvarez stated that was achieved by streamlining services, reallocating staff, delaying of some expenditures and by introducing cuts which the Board feels will not impact programs and services.

Dr. Alvarez stated that cuts were made in the areas of new staff, current staff, administrative staff, support staff and food services.

Dr. Alvarez explained that over the past several years, many things have been done to reduce expenditures, such as:

- Shared services i.e. purchasing, transportation, utilities, technology
custodial services

- Health benefits – increased deductibles and co-pays

- Grants – solicited private donors

- Montclair Fund for Educational Excellence

- PTA

- Careful watch on spending, resulting in larger fund balance allocation

Dr. Alvarez noted that last year \$1.6 million in reductions were made as well as a loss of \$1 million in state aid.

Dr. Alvarez noted that this year's budget reflects the Board's continuing efforts to provide an exceptional education experience for our student. The Board's goals are to maintain all existing programs at their current levels, enhance programs and strive to introduce new curricula that will help prepare all students for a new global economy. He stated that the second proposal encompasses programs which are beyond those required to fulfill the Core Curriculum Content Standards, but which the Board feels are essential and urges the Board of School Estimate to consider this proposal.

In summary, Dr. Alvarez stated that the Board is proud to present

- a budget that reflects one of the lowest increases in recent years
- a budget that appropriates the largest fund balance in recent years
- a budget that introduces a number of effective program enhancements to our educational programs, which will aid in maintaining a competitive edge and preparing students for a global society, and
- a budget that reflects the Board's sensitivity to taxpayers.

Dana Sullivan stated that she would provide a summary of what is in the budget and noted that some of the highlights of the budget are:

Continuation of the Board's goals

Reduction of class size from 27-28 several years ago to slightly under 24

Overall budget increase of 4.7%

State and Federal government continues to reduce support to schools

Enrollment is high compared to years ago but State and Federal aid has decreased steadily; therefore 85% of budget is supported by local property taxes.

Dana Sullivan explained that the Board of Education adopted a tentative budget and submitted it to the County Superintendent for approval. Prior to the final adoption of the budget on March 17, \$1,287,750, representing 22.3 staff positions, was reduced from the budget. Mrs. Sullivan stated that \$2.5 million was taken from fund balance as revenue, which allowed a reduction in the tax levy and that this was the lowest tax increase in many years. She noted that the reason such a large amount was available in fund balance was due to the fact that in prior years, an effort was made to put additional monies received as well as any savings into fund balance so that it could be used to reduce taxes.

Mrs. Sullivan noted that the State sets the cap at 4% and sets a limit on how much we can increase the tax levy but does allow a board to request waivers for items of extraordinary cost; therefore allowing a board to increase the cap. This year \$867,000 was requested in waivers in four areas – special education, energy costs, liability insurance and equipment purchases. The State only approved the special education waiver and left us \$1,308,881 over cap. Mrs. Sullivan explained that since we are over

cap, the Board of School Estimate will vote on the base budget as one part of the budget and vote separately on the separate proposal. She stated that if the Board of School Estimate makes reductions to the base budget, the Board of Education can reallocate funds but if the Board of School Estimate makes reductions to the separate proposal, those items cannot be added back to the base budget.

Mrs. Sullivan explained the five areas of the separate proposal as student achievement, Artists in Residence, school security, Health and Wellness Program and the Montclair Parking Authority.

Mrs. Sullivan also noted that new items were added to the budget, such as a World Language Teacher to teach Chinese at the elementary and middle schools, a string teacher at the elementary level, technology (capital budget), addition of a Transition Facilitator for special education and a middle school Literacy Specialist.

Mrs. Sullivan explained that the Cost Per Pupil is calculated by the State of New Jersey for all districts. She noted that figures come from the State after they do comparison with other districts and that the 2005-2006 cost per pupil for our district is \$12,269. Mrs. Sullivan noted that the state average is \$11,857, which is lower than ours but the average is \$12,535 for similar districts. She also noted that costs for out-of-district tuition and out-of-district transportation are deducted from the calculations since those costs are not comparable district to district. Mrs. Sullivan explained that Montclair spends more than the State average but we spend 7.6% more on instruction, less on administrative costs, more on support instruction, less on plant and more on extra curricular.

In summary, Mrs. Sullivan stated that this budget has the lowest tax increase in years, the largest fund balance appropriated in 10 years and contains cost effective program enhancements and sensitivity with current economic times.

V. Discussion on 2008-2009 Budget, Members of the Board of School Estimate

Shelly Lombard wanted to address two groups of the public. The first was the group that wanted the Board to provide additional programs and staff. Ms. Lombard wanted them to know that the Board was trying to be prudent and cannot add all they are requesting without additional resources.

Ms. Lombard wanted to address the second group that was concerned with the large tax increase. Ms. Lombard wanted them to know that the Board's goal is to maintain services for a good quality of education and

that 83% of the budget are for salaries and benefits since we want the highest quality of staff. Ms. Lombard stated that the Board is aware that we are in tough economic times and realize that all decisions impact the students.

VI. Receive comments from the Public concerning the 2008-2009 School Budget

Albert Pelham – 228 Bloomfield Avenue - Executive Director of Montclair Neighborhood Development Corporation. Mr. Pelham runs the Project Oasis summer and winter programs for the 11th year and urges the Board of School Estimate to support Project Oasis and well as the Health and Wellness Program.

Bianca Neally – 16 Bruce Road - feels that economic environment does not warrant the introduction of a Chinese program at this time.

James Harris – 9 Pleasant Avenue – President of NAACP – Mr. Harris is concerned with way the budget is structured. Mr. Harris stated that the items in the separate proposal are minority achievement programs and hopes that the budget will be approved. He stated that these programs are very important and of great value for Montclair.

Betty Strauss – Montclair High School - District Senior Nurse – Ms. Strauss distributed information regarding nurses and spoke in support of school nurses and the Health and Wellness Program. Ms. Strauss explained how critical it is to have full-time nurses in each building since there are so many children with special health issues.

Dr. Virginia Cornue – 129 Lincoln Street –Dr. Cornue spoke in support of the Chinese program and stated how important she felt it is to have the children learn another language. Dr. Cornue noted that there are several other districts teaching Chinese and the programs have been very well accepted.

Rachel Spaulding – 41 Melrose Place – Chair of Montclair SPED (Parent Advisory Council) – Ms. Spaulding urged the Board of School Estimate to maintain services we now provide and supported the Health and Wellness Program as well as the nurses.

Susan Weintraub – 14 Heller Drive – spoke in support of the nurses and how important they are to the district and students.

Dennis Murray – President of MEA – spoke in support of the nurses, librarians, instructional aides and student assistance counselor.

Ed Goodell – 14 Greenview Way - supports the Chinese program but would rather see it at the high school level.

Ellen McMorrow – 109 Summit Avenue – spoke in support of the nurses in schools.

Ann Riordon – 183 Summit Avenue – supported the nurses who care for our students.

Doreen Corsetto – Head Librarian for Montclair Public Schools – Ms. Corsetto spoke on behalf and in support of the school librarians and how they help the students.

Ellen Kolba – 16 Montclair Avenue – spoke in support of the Writers Room Program.

Wendy Sabin – 21 Duryea Road – Ms. Sabin suggested that a Student Assistance Counselor be added at Glenfield and supports the technology program at Glenfield School. She also stated that she supports the Health and Wellness Program.

Joann Aidala – 95 Montclair Avenue - Co-founder Montclair Health and Wellness Program. Ms. Aidala stated that the program has over 200 partners and many volunteers. Ms. Aidala stated that the Board contributed \$270,000 to the Health and Wellness Program, which in turn, as allowed them to bring in grant funds of \$1.1 million.

Dr. Howard Wilson – 54 Plymouth Street - Montclair school physician – spoke in support of the school nurses.

Diana Autin – 9 Lexington Avenue – Ms. Autin spoke in support of the Health and Wellness Program, special education and school librarians. Ms. Autin stated that she supports the separate proposal and wants the Board to reconsider any reductions in special education.

Adele Katz – 36 Glen Park Road - Executive Director for Sister to Sister Mentoring Program for high school girls. Ms. Katz noted how the program promotes leadership, team work and wanted the Board to know that she supports the Sister to Sister Program.

Cheyenne Bailey – 42 Walnut Crescent – junior at Montclair High School – Cheyenne stated she has been involved in the Sister to Sister Program since her freshman year and supports the program and spoke on the importance of mentoring 8th grade girls to the high school.

Dr. Renee Baskerville – 371 Orange Road – Dr. Baskerville spoke in support of the Health and Wellness Program and school nurses. Dr. Baskerville stated the importance of having adequate health care for families and noted that for some

families, the education from the program and school nurses is all they receive. Dr. Baskerville also spoke in support of the IMANI, Sister to Sister and Project Oasis programs and how important they are to the students.

Karen Straim – 196 No. Mountain Avenue - read a message from Laura Torchio in support of the Health and Wellness Program of how important the program is to students.

Jim Price – 47 Gordonhurst Street – spoke in support of school nurses and special education.

Sharon Di Donato – 521 Upper Mountain Avenue –Ms. DiDonato spoke in support of having Chinese taught in the school system and how important it is to have children learn other languages at an early age.

Paula Kaufman – 656 Ridgewood – Ms. Kaufman spoke on the need of having adequate funding for security at Montclair High School. Ms. Kaufman stated that by having security visible at the high school, she feels would enforce the codes of conduct and provide for a safe environment for staff and students.

Yen Uy Honggang Li –224 Valley Road – spoke in support of the Chinese program and stated that she felt teaching it in early grades would be beneficial.

John Lytle – 40 Union Street – Mr. Lytle stated that he had traveled to China and how important he felt it was that students be taught the language in second or third grade. Mr. Lytle stated that two important languages in China are English and Portuguese and totally supports the program to teach Chinese.

Lois Whipple – 19 Prescott Avenue – Director of Montclair Fund for Educational Excellence - spoke in support of the School Community Initiatives.

Cary Africk – 2 Erwin Park – Mr. Africk stated that after hearing much testimony about the different program and agrees that the programs are needed but urges the Board to re-examine the budget and perhaps find different approaches to funding these programs.

Davida Lindsay Harewood – Ms. Harewood spoke in support the IMANI Program and would like to see the programs continue. As a taxpayer, she felt the money is well spent.

Audrey Hawley – 17 Grenada Place – stated that it is important to keep minority achievement programs, student assistant counselors and the Health and Wellness Program in the budget.

Paul Mockowitz – Senior Program Director at YMCA – Mr. Mockowitz stated that as a health partner in Health and Wellness Program, he totally supports the program. He stated that he has seen first hand the benefits.

Gail Prusslin – 138 Buckingham Road – spoke on behalf of the instructional music program and the Writers Room and feels that it is money well spent.

Steven Gooder – 20 Berkeley Place – After reviewing the capital and operating budgets for the last few years, Mr. Gooder would like to see the Board of School Estimate consider making reductions but feels that the programs are important.

Jarvis Hawley – 17 Grenada Place – Mr. Hawley stated that he was an actively involved with MCIA and the Health and Wellness Program and feels that the work of these two organizations/programs is very worthwhile. Mr. Hawley also stated that the school nurses are actively involved in the Emergency Management Program and Safety Prevention Program and are very important to the district.

Mayor Remsen stated that the Board of School Estimate would need additional time to decide on the budget with regard to administrative cuts, benefits, reallocations etc.

Gerald Tobin explained that the Board of School Estimate is the representative of the taxpayer and that the Board does not want to cut instruction but wants to cut administration.

The next Board of School Estimate is schedule for Thursday, April 3, 2008 at 6:00 p.m. at Board of Education building, 22 Valley Road.

VII. Adjournment

At 10:20 p.m. Gerald Tobin moved to adjourn the meeting; seconded by Shirley Lombard and approved by a vote of 3 – 0.