



## **Education Committee - Board of Representatives**

Megan Cottrell, Chair

Ramya Shaw, Vice Chair

# **Committee Report**

**Date:** Thursday, February 29, 2024  
**Time:** 7:00 p.m.  
**Place:** *This meeting was held remotely.*

The Education Committee met as indicated above. In attendance were Chair Cottrell, Vice-Chair Shaw and Committee Member Reps. Mays and Weinberg. Reps. Jean-Louis, Pierre-Louis, and Strain were excused. Also in attendance was Rep. Stella; Dr. Tamu Lucero, Superintendent; Ryan Fealey, Director of Finance; Alice Knapp, Ferguson Library CEO; Matthew Quiñones, Director of Operations; Michael Hyman, Director of Domus Kids; Katherine Lobalbo, Director of School Construction; Rebecca Hamman, Board of Education; and Jackie Heftman, Board of Education.

<b>Item No.</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Committee Action</b>
1. <a href="#">E31.025</a>	REVIEW; The Removal of Veterans Day as a School Holiday by the Stamford Public Schools. 02/07/24 – Submitted by Rep. Stella	<b>Report Made</b>

Rep. Stella questioned if there is a possibility of removing another day from the school calendar, i.e. a day during winter recess. Board of Education (BOE) member Jackie Heftman explained that the Board did consider it but ultimately decided against it as the winter recess has already been shortened to a long weekend. Superintendent Lucero pointed out some ways that Veteran's Day was celebrated in Stamford schools in the past and that the students who do attend classes on Federal Holidays are required by state statute to find a meaningful way to celebrate that holiday. Rick Redniss of Redniss & Meade along with Tony Pavia the former principal of Stamford High School, are partnering with Stamford public schools to ensure Veteran's Day is celebrated properly. Superintendent Lucero urged the Committee members to provide any feedback regarding the Veteran's Day celebration plans and to also join the students and school staff in celebrating.

Rep. Weinberg questioned the plan for engaging stakeholders in the development of curriculum for Veteran's Day. Superintendent Lucero stated that the Board is welcoming any suggestions of events or activities that they would like to see happen on Veteran's Day.

BOE member Rebecca Hamman voiced her concerns regarding a community survey that was not addressed before the vote took place and the school curriculum that she feels has been distorted nationally because of ideology. Adding that policies need to be put in place to not only limit the amount of religious holiday so as to not overflow the school calendar with days off but to also vet the guests/speakers who visit the schools.

Director Hyman disagreed that the school curriculum is distorted and that the Board voted on what they felt would be in the best interests of the students. He stated that community outreach has taken place on the subject and resident veterans were asked for their input.

Rep. Stella questioned when the survey and conversation with resident veterans took place, to which Superintendent Lucero stated that the survey was conducted before the meeting and the discussion with resident veterans took place after the meeting. BOE member Hamman clarified that the survey she was referring to was not executed by Superintendent Lucero, it was conducted by the Calendar Committee.

No further discussion was had, and Item No. 1 was closed.

2. [E31.028](#) REVIEW; Overview of BOE budget, including Cost Drivers and Measures Taken to Keep those Costs under Control. **Report Made**  
02/07/24 – Submitted by Rep. Cottrell

Director Fealey discussed the BOE budget which is available to view on the Stamford public school's website. The first draft for next year's budget was almost 10% increase which represented a continuation of the current programs and included other increases such as:

- Health care (5-7% increase for next year).
- First Student transportation (nearly 10% increase in costs for next year).
- Facilities department (i.e. replacing or fixing HVAC systems, boilers, flooring and roofing).
- Out of district special education tuition.
- In district services (i.e. occupational, physical, and behavioral therapy).
- Insurance (initial estimate for general liability, property, and casualty insurance was 28% increase, decreasing to about 20%).

The day-to-day maintenance has been underfunded for some time, which explains the reason behind the large increase in the first draft of the budget. Also included in the budget are the ESSER (Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief) positions, 120 of which have been funded by federal grants for the last couple of years. ESSER funding will be eliminated by the end of the year and those positions will need a new funding source. Cuts to the facilities budget were made before the budget went to the BOE. Reductions were also made to staffing before the 6.4% budget increase went to the BOE.

Director Fealey pointed out that if the BOE were able to keep the increases to health care, transportation, special education, and insurance, they would be able to cut \$5.5 million off the budget. Due to job insecurity during covid, the Board reduced the City's estimated revenue by over \$50 million and as a result the BOE budget was cut by \$12.5 million. Once the ESSER funds were received some BOE positions became available, \$10 million was given to the facilities department and school development office to assist with the long-term facilities plan and summer school was extended. Without the budget increase the Board will have to reduce staff, school programs, and the size of the school district which will go into effect immediately on the first of July.

Rep. Weinberg questioned if there was any attempt to treat First Student as a monopoly to which Director Fealey explained that a suit was filed more than ten years ago. It resulted in a consent decree where they were required to lessen some of their monopolistic power. If a district wanted to go out to bid and shows a vendor other than First Student, First Student was required to essentially allow the transaction of their property to the new vendor. The consent decree is no longer in force. The BOE is working with Director Quiñones to find an alternate place in the City to serve as a bus depot so that the City will be able to put out a competitive bid. The BOE is currently in year one of a three-year term with Student First. Chair Cottrell inquired about the possibility of bringing buses back in house to which Director Fealey explained that discussions have taken place.

No further discussion was had, and Item No. 2 was closed.

3. E31.027      REVIEW; Continued Work that the Library does in      **Report Made**  
the Community.  
02/07/24 – Submitted by Rep. Cottrell

Alice Knapp, CEO of the Ferguson Library discussed services that the library provides to support Stamford schools such as:

- Extended loan periods.
- Customized learning kits including books, puppets and supplemental activities.
- Linked libraries (where the student's ID is the library card number).
- Delivery of reserved books to schools.
- Purple bus visits (programs that are brought directly to the schools).
- Outreach programs (parent/teacher workshops, family reading, story walks, The Bookmobile, and tutoring).
- Online assignment alerts (setting aside materials for student assignments).
- Joint Stamford Public Schools/Ferguson Library summer reading lists for children and adults.
- Camp outreach and book giveaways.
- Continuing education (FAFSA assistance and youth employment opportunities).
- Financial literacy (budgeting, estate planning, etc. for adults and teens).
- English language services.
- Wellness Expos (mental health kits, suicide prevention training, yoga, ballroom dancing and Zumba classes).
- Job search services (interviewing skills, tech workshops).
- Entrepreneur and small business services (networking, loan resources, and one-on-one coaching).

Rep. Shaw questioned if there were Spanish learning services to which Ms. Knapp explained the library has several language programs, online learning programs, and a Spanish book club but not a Spanish language instructor.

No further discussion was had, and Item No. 3 was closed.

4. [E31.026](#)      REVIEW; School Construction Updates.      **Report Made**  
02/07/24 – Submitted by Rep. Cottrell

Over a half a billion dollars in funding was authorized for the construction of four campuses and three schools (Westhill, Roxbury, and the South school).

Director Lobalbo discussed the Westhill track replacement and Turn of River's boiler replacement projects that were completed this past summer. In June 2023 the State increased the authorization amount for the grant for Westhill from \$264 million to \$301 million. There are expectations to bring down energy costs and to be very efficient with the selection of the mechanical systems. Planning and design are usually conducted from January to May. The construction that will take place this summer will likely be split across two summers due to summer school sessions. Construction is expected to mobilize in Summer 2025 with a completion date of 2028 or 2029. Students will remain in school during construction. Once the new building is constructed the existing building will be taken down.

Timelines for Roxbury and the South School are as follows:

- Roxbury
  - Architect selection - February 2024
  - Owners representative selection - April 2024
  - Construction manager selection - August 2024
  - Construction - Fall 2025
  
- South School (two campuses that are nine miles apart)
  - Accepted to the priority list - December 2024
  - Approved by State Legislature - June 2024
  - Architectural selection - June-December 2024

In regard to South School, grades K-4 will be located at the Lockwood Ave campus. That building will be demolished and rebuilt first. The students at K.T. Murphy will be moved to the Lockwood Ave campus then K.T. Murphy will be demolished and be rebuilt on Horton Street for grades 5-8.

A \$3 million DEEP (Department of Energy & Environmental Protection) and DECD (Department of Economic Development) grant was approved to fund the Stamford High School to construct a multi-purpose field.

Many of the projects are receiving the office of grants administration with 60% of the reimbursement rate applying to not only large capital projects but several smaller projects as well. Competitive grants have also been sought, such as the grant received last year that was spread across numerous projects. The next budget cycle will focus on:

- Life safety
- Accessibility
- Weather proofing
- Sustainability

Director Quiñones discussed the governance and overall management of the project that includes representation from all the boards. Owners Rep is a new approach taken to manage projects that consists of a consulting firm that runs the day-to-day operations of the construction site representing the City's (owners) interest. Legal services familiar with construction projects to negotiate the City's contract are being outsourced. More internal purchasing support that focuses solely on school construction will be brought in as well as an additional manager. A 504 consultant will also be sought.

A website (spsbuilds.com) was developed during a summer internship with the help of three students that graduated from Westhill, AITE, and Stamford High. The site will be a source of information for the public on the progress of the school construction projects.

Rep. Mays questioned if the schools would allow for expansion to accommodate additional students to which Superintendent Lucero explained that there will be wiggle room and some of the properties are able to be expanded.

No further discussion was had, and Item No. 3 was closed.

Chair Cottrell adjourned the meeting at 9:03 pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
Megan Cottrell, Chair

This meeting is on [video](#).