



Town of Ridgefield
Board of Selectpersons Meeting Minutes
UNAPPROVED

February 27, 2024 at 7:00pm

Please note – these minutes are not verbatim.

Present: Rudy Marconi, Sean Connelly, Maureen Kozlark, Chris Murray

Absent: Barbara Manners

Rudy Marconi called the meeting to order at 7:00pm.

1. Board of Education Budget

Rachel Carrell, 99 Wooster Heights Drive, voiced support for the Board of Education budget.

Dr. Susie Da Silva, Superintendent of Schools, Cory Gillette, Assistant Superintendent, Dr. Elizabeth Hannaway, Assistant Superintendent of Special Services, Jill Browne, Director of Finance, Dr. Wes DeSantis, Director of Educational Technology, Karen Dewing, Director of Personnel, Joseph Morits, Director of Facilities, Tina Malhotra, Board of Education Chair, and Board of Education Members Sean McEvoy, Christine More, Jonathan Paradiso were present. Topics discussed included:

- A proposed 3.97% budget increase (requesting \$115,410,000), which the Board of Education (BoE) believes to be fiscally responsible.
- Dr. Da Silva shared current enrolment is 4,417. Rudy Marconi asked about classroom space and class sizes. Dr. Da Silva shared classrooms are at capacity and the schools utilize hallways for small groups and students with learning differences.
- Mr. Marconi asked about having sufficient space in the future. Dr. Da Silva said within five (5) years the current space will no longer meet the needs of the schools, and shared the BoE's Strategic Planning Committee has released an RFP to create a master plan for the schools. Maureen Kozlark asked about taking a universal look at the buildings owned and finding efficiencies. Dr. Da Silva shared once the master plan is complete, that will help the BoE determine what's recommended from an efficiency perspective.
- Dr. Da Silva and Dr. Hannaway discussed the RISE program and new Pathway program for students with complex needs, and how they do their best to provide programming to keep all students in their district. Ms. Kozlark asked about determining which program is best for students. Dr. Hannaway explained it's based on profile, where RISE services multi-disciplinary needs and is the most intensive and restrictive program.
- Dr. Da Silva discussed school culture, staff recruitment, providing adequate support for staff, and shared the Teachers Union supports the budget as it stands.

- Mr. Marconi asked about the relationship between spending per student and student performance. Dr. Da Silva shared there is a correlation, but student performance at Ridgefield Public Schools varies based on content area and grade levels, and the schools have seen growth across the board, especially in math. Ms. Kozlark asked if students are still catching up from COVID. All agreed. Ms. Gillette shared they're focused on year-over-year growth, and talked about the impact of COVID especially on high school students who learned Algebra I at home and students who would have been in kindergarten, shared the curriculum has been adjusted to ensure students are meeting the standards. Sean Connelly asked about learning losses relative to DRG (District Reference Group). Dr. Da Silva shared every school district has the same challenges with learning loss, and meeting students' social and emotional needs. Ms. Gillette shared they have seen recovery and growth wherever the schools have placed emphasis.
- Dr. Da Silva, Ms. Browne, Dr. Hannaway, and Dr. DeSantis discussed operating budget drivers: finding adequate space for pre-K, 18-22, and Alternative High School programs; staff health benefits; hiring a psychologist, world language instructor, 8 permanent paraprofessionals, nurse, assistant principal, school security officer, shared custodian, math tutors, communication specialist (some roles were previously consultants and now brought in-district to realize efficiencies); inflation-driven material resource costs; partnership with Kids in Crisis; fiber deployment.
 - o Dr. Da Silva shared the alternative high school's current space is not appropriate for the population it serves, and they're considering a way to combine the alternative high school and 18-22 program into a shared space.
 - o Dr. Da Silva shared the 18-22 program will need a new space for Fall 2025. Mr. Connelly asked about the ideal scenario for finding space. Dr. Da Silva said finding an existing space that can be modified to meet their students' needs. The pre-k/preschool program would need to be separate and could easily grow from the current 4.5 classrooms to 8 or more.
 - o Mr. Marconi suggested a tri-board meeting to discuss space requirements.
 - o Mr. Connelly asked about time in art vs. world language class. Dr. Da Silva shared art education is integrated into other courses and world language is integrated into social studies classes. Ms. Kozlark asked about world language grade level. Dr. Da Silva confirmed grades 3-5, with programs rolling out for other grade levels in future years.
- Mr. Morits discussed capital budget requests: Veteran's Park auditorium renovation, Branchville student and staff bathrooms, Farmingville cafetorium sound attenuation, main switch gear replacement, culinary arts classroom split, finishing out the 7-year technology cycle, proprietary lock sets in non-student spaces, LED lighting, replacing a groundskeeper vehicle with an EV cargo van, department-by-department annual furniture changeout, East Ridge student locker replacement, RHS auditorium design.

2. Possible Capital/Operating Budget Vote

There was no vote.

Maureen Kozlark motioned to adjourn the meeting at 10:01pm. Sean Connelly seconded. Motion carried 4-0.