

STATE OF CONNECTICUT
MUNICIPAL ACCOUNTABILITY REVIEW BOARD (MARB)

REGULAR MEETING NOTICE AND AGENDA
Hartford Subcommittee of the MARB

Meeting Date and Time: Thursday, January 28, 2021 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Meeting Location: This meeting will be telephonic. Meeting materials may be accessed at the following website: <https://portal.ct.gov/OPM/Marb/West-Haven-Committee-Meetings-and-Materials>

Call-In Instructions: Meeting participants may use the following telephone number and access code

Telephone Number: (860) 840-2075

Meeting ID: 936 309 40

Agenda

- I. Call to Order & Opening Remarks
- II. Approval of Minutes:
 - a. October 22, 2020 regular meeting
 - b. December 10, 2020 special meeting
- III. Review and Discussion: FY 2020 Audit and Financial Results
- IV. Update: Status of Board of Education Special Education Study
- V. Other Related Business
- VI. Adjourn

DRAFT

STATE OF CONNECTICUT
MUNICIPAL ACCOUNTABILITY REVIEW BOARD (MARB)

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
Hartford Subcommittee of the MARB

Meeting Date and Time: Thursday, October 22, 2020 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Meeting Location: This was a telephonic meeting. Meeting materials may be accessed at the following website: <https://portal.ct.gov/OPM/Marb/West-Haven-Committee-Meetings-and-Materials>

Call-In Instructions: Meeting participants may use the following telephone number and access code

Telephone Number: (860) 840-2075

Meeting ID: 256 607 967

Members in Attendance: Kimberly Kennison (OPM Secretary designee), Christine Shaw (State Treasurer designee), Mark Waxenberg, Robert White, David Biller (joined 10:09), Matthew Brokman (joined 10:13), Stephen Falcigno (joined 10:29).

City Officials in Attendance: Mayor Bronin, Jolita Lazauskas, Leigh Ann Ralls, Mike Lupkus, David Fleig

OPM Staff in Attendance: Julian Freund

I. Call to Order & Opening Remarks

The meeting was called to order at 10:07 AM.

II. Approval of Minutes:

a. July 23, 2020 regular meeting

Mr. Waxenberg made a motion, with a second by Mr. White, to approve the minutes of the July 23, 2020 meeting. All voted in favor.

III. Update: Corrective Action Plan re: FY 2019 Audit

a. City

The City reported on the actions to implement the auditor's recommendations concerning IT controls. Of the 11 recommendations, 8 have been closed. The process of encrypting laptops continues. Implementation of two recommendations regarding IT policies and procedures and the

development of a disaster recovery plan may be delayed as a result of the ransomware attack that occurred earlier this fall.

b. Board of Education

Mr. Fleig reviewed a status report on the Board of Education corrective action plan. Most of the corrective measures, including steps to update and formalize the year-end closure process, have either been completed or are expected to be completed by the end of the calendar year. The most significant challenge has been in filling an Accountant position.

IV. Status of FY20 close

The City presented a tentative audit timeline. Blum Shapiro plans to begin field work on October 26 continuing through week of November 9. The targeted date for submittal of a draft report to the City is December 11. Although some delays in the process were caused by the ransomware attack, the City is expecting to meet the 12/31/20 deadline for submitting its FY 2020 financial statements.

V. Update BOE projected final expenditures FY 2020

The Board of Education's updated final expenditures in FY 2020 project an end of year balance of \$5.1 million. Of this amount, it is expected that approximately \$2.7 will be set aside as Committed Fund Balance for a subsequent BOE budget. When combined with the approximately \$3 million previously set aside as Committee Fund Balance for the BOE, the total Committed Fund Balance for the BOE would reach \$5.7 million, which is roughly 2% of the BOE budget and the maximum that may be set aside for that purpose.

The remaining \$2.4 million end-of-year balance that is not expected to be set aside as Committed Fund Balance, would roll to General Fund Balance as either Assigned or Unassigned Fund Balance (though some portion of that amount may be needed for outstanding claims related to a transportation contract).

VI. Update: Status of Board of Education RFP for Special Education Study

This item was tabled.

VII. Other Related Business

The City provided a number of items in response to questions raised by the Subcommittee at prior meetings. Among these, was an update on the City's projected General Fund balance as of June 30, 2020. Based on a projected FY 2020 surplus of \$14 million, the City anticipates a total General Fund Balance of approximately \$31.4 million. Of that amount, \$5.7 million is expected to be Committed for subsequent BOE budgets and \$5 million will be Assigned as a contingency for economic uncertainty. The remaining \$20.7 million would be Unassigned Fund Balance. Mayor Bronin noted that a subsequent Assignment in Fund Balance may be made to pre-fund a violence reduction initiative. A previous transfer of \$5 million to pre-fund the development of a crisis response team is already reflected in the fund balance projections.

In response to questions regarding the City's Golf Enterprise Fund, several years of historical financial information was reviewed. Some discrepancies in the FY 2021 budget figures for the enterprise fund were noted, and the City was asked to provide clarifying information for the next meeting.

The City presented a sensitivity analysis of Grand List Projections depicting the impact of potential variances between projected and actual grand list growth rates. A similar analysis was presented that projects the potential budget impact of future general wage increases.

The Subcommittee also reviewed information concerning potential Workers Compensation provisions regarding return to work practices as well as additional information regarding Information Technology planning in the public safety departments.

Mr. Waxenberg indicated that he intends to submit a proposal for State legislation that would make certain municipalities, including Hartford, eligible for additional State financial assistance. Mayor Bronin noted that the implementation of the previously adopted municipal revenue sharing account was delayed in the State budget process and that he would advocate that the State move forward with that program as a form of revenue diversification for municipalities.

VIII. Adjourn

A motion to adjourn was made by Mr. White with a second by Mr. Waxenberg. The motion passed and the meeting adjourned at 11:56 AM.

DRAFT

STATE OF CONNECTICUT
MUNICIPAL ACCOUNTABILITY REVIEW BOARD (MARB)

SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
Hartford Subcommittee of the MARB

Meeting Date and Time: Thursday, December 10, 2020 10:00 AM – 10:30 AM

Meeting Location: This was a telephonic meeting. Meeting materials may be accessed at the following website:
<https://portal.ct.gov/OPM/Marb/West-Haven-Committee-Meetings-and-Materials>

Call-In Instructions:

Telephone Number: (860) 840-2075

Meeting ID: 353 738 685

Subcommittee Members in Attendance: Kimberly Kennison (OPM Secretary designee), Christine Shaw (State Treasurer designee), Matthew Brokman, Stephen Falcigno, Robert White, Mark Waxenberg

Other MARB Members in Attendance: Sal Luciano

City Officials in Attendance: Mayor Bronin, Jolita Lazauskas, Mike Lupkus, Leigh Ann Ralls

OPM Staff in Attendance: Julian Freund

I. Call to Order & Opening Remarks

The meeting was called to order at 10:04 AM.

II. Review, Discussion and Possible Action: Labor Contract

a. Hartford Firefighters Association, Local 760

The proposed contract is a successor contract to one that expired June 30, 2020. The term of the proposed contract runs through December 2024. The City has provided the contract, a fiscal analysis and comparables to other municipalities.

Mayor Bronin noted that the Firefighters were the first union to agree to several concessions in the prior contract. The prior contract provided no wage increases for four years, shifted members to a high deductible health insurance plan, and increased employees' pension contributions and health insurance premium cost share. The proposed contract is a four and a half year contract. It includes a 1.5% wage increase that takes effect January 2021 and a 1.5% wage increase that takes effect in July 2021. The remainder of the contract provides no wage increases. Employees' health insurance premium cost share increases by a percentage point in FY 2022 and again in FY 2023. Changes the City sought regarding transitional duty and return to work provisions are included in the proposed contract.

Mr. White asked about the change in the step increases and education of members regarding use of the health savings account. Mayor Bronin noted that the HSA has been in place for several years and most members are familiar with the plan, and that the City is willing to continue education at the union's request. He also explained that the prior contract reduced the pay scale for new hires after January 2017. At the time, the City anticipated considerable hiring activity. The provision in the proposed contract, raises the high end of the pay scale somewhat.

Mr. Luciano said that HSA plans do not save money in the long term because members defer treatment to avoid paying the deductible. He added that the salary increases are needed in order to attract Firefighter applicants and that he supports the contract.

Ms. Kennison recalled that the City's 5-Year Plan did not include salary increases resulting from collective bargaining and asked if this contract would represent an additional expense. Mayor Bronin confirmed that is the case.

Mr. Waxenberg asked if the City monitors the cost of the HSA plan as compared to the State Partnership Plan. The Mayor indicated the City does track that data.

Mr. Waxenber made a motion to recommend the full Board approve the Firefighters contract, with a second from Mr. Falcigno. The motion was approved 6-0-0.

III. Adjourn

Mr. Falcigno made a motion, with a second by Mr. White, to adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 10:25 AM.

MEMO

To: MARB
From: Dr. Leslie Torres-Rodriguez, Superintendent
Date: January 23, 2021
Re: Update on Special Education

Below please find background information, current restructuring efforts, and next steps related to Special Education programming at Hartford Public Schools (HPS).

Background issues with Special Education services

a. High cost, out-of-district placements

We have reviewed 10 years worth of data to better understand the trends and decisions made for our special education students. The data shows a steady increase in costs associated with the out of district tuition costs. The lack of Tier I instruction and appropriate strategies, including the lack of a true Multi-Tiered System of Supports to truly support student needs can be attributed to these costs.

b. Referrals made by other districts for special services

When our students attend schools outside of HPS (magnets, Open Choice), and they struggle with the setting, the schools have the opportunity to place those students into an approved private special education program (APSEP). The cost associated with the students attending these APSEPs is the responsibility of HPS to pay.

c. How to serve more students in district

Four in-district programs have been proposed for consideration (Transition for 18-22 year olds, Tier 2/3 programming, School avoidant/school anxiety programming, and a program for non-attenders). Each program has a start-up cost (\$500,000) inclusive of staff and instructional materials. Space would need to be identified. The reasoning behind this in-district design is to resolve the exceedingly high number of students being outplaced to private programming, and the associated cost. While HPS has a declining enrollment, the number of students being placed in private programs continues to climb. Thus, if we look from a systemic standpoint, creating in-district programs could reduce the out of district costs, including transportation.

1. STEP Program (Transition for 18-22-year-old students, with build-out at Burns Elementary.

At the moment, the projected enrollment numbers indicate:

- 2021-2022 (9 students)
- 2022-2023 (11 students)
- 2023-2024 (12 students)
- 2024-2025 (12 students)

If we have a student attending a 4-year transition, out of district program, the cost could be upwards of \$400,000 over four years. An in-district program not only promotes the Hartford community as a viable work experience, but it encourages students to stay in Hartford and



become an active participant in society. Lastly, this type of programming could become a revenue source as we could provide the service to other districts.

2. **Tier 2/3 MTSS (Multi-Tiered System of Supports) program:** To address the needs of students in magnet schools that are currently being referred to CREC's Building Blocks program, HPS can create a MTSS program to address the needs. This program has potential to provide tiered supports and data tracking to manage behaviors before making a special education referral. If we have a student that is identified as special education at first grade, and requires an outplacement, the cost over 12 years could be in the range of \$840,000. Developing a program to address the needs of students in a Tier 2/3 startup program could be \$500,000. This potential programming could take two to four years to develop.
3. **Step-Back Program for Non-Attendees** (For students transitioning back to district from Out of District Programming). This will be a more challenging program to create as the student numbers fluctuate. An initial focus could be on high school students who are ready to transition back, focused on graduating and don't require a more restrictive setting. This can also be implemented at the middle school level. The cost for an out of district placement could be up to \$80,000-90,000 a year. Developing a program to address the needs of students transitioning back to the district over a year startup could be \$500,000
4. **School Anxiety/School Avoidance Program**
HPS, along with other school districts, has been experiencing an increase in the number of students who are school avoidant. The reasons may vary, but the main reason given for these behaviors has been that the student has anxiety, which prevents them from coming to school. Historically, HPS has worked with the students and their families to create a plan (504 or Individualized Education Plan/IEP) using current resources to help the student access the general curriculum. Our success in dealing with the issue locally has been mixed and we have had to outplace a number of students who require more intensive services.

A solution is to create a program for HPS to meet the needs of some of our more involved school avoidant students. Each student's program would be individualized and designed to provide students with the opportunity to be both academically successful and in the least restrictive educational environment that would meet their needs. HPS would be able to offer a range of support, from a full self-contained program to a more flexible program that would allow the student to take electives or classes in regular education classes.

As part of the 2021-22 budget development process, we are assessing the financial feasibility of implementing and sustaining any of the recommended programs.

Departmental restructuring efforts and new ways of work (informed by recommendations from Civic Solutions Group for the next phase of work)

a. Delivery of Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) services

While HPS has committed to a MTSS framework, district leadership recognize a need for improved Tier 1 supports and cohesive trauma-informed practices. Currently, personnel report to different managers and have different reporting structures, which can hinder the district's



ability to coordinate the oversight, roles, and responsibilities of HPS's trauma-informed supports and services.

The lack of coherence in its approach to MTSS and trauma-informed care has led to inequities and inefficiencies across the continuum of services that HPS provides students, especially for students with disabilities. An MTSS District Coach has been hired and is supporting efforts to develop a clear vision and actionable plan for how HPS will systematically address MTSS, Tier 1, and trauma-informed supports and services in a unified, comprehensive way.

b. Structure of Office of Student Support Services (OSSS) and other departments

Currently In-District Directors spend the majority of their time chairing PPT's. This takes away from their ability to observe instructional practices and student learning, provide strategic feedback on high yield strategies to implement and then create purposeful professional learning. As a result, HPS has an exceedingly high number of students being referred to out of district placements or paraeducators are written into the Individualized Education Plan, both of which have a financial implication on the district.

Some next steps as part of a departmental reorganization include revisions to Director-level roles and responsibilities to implement compliance and other supports to ensure interventions are being implemented and documented with fidelity in order to reduce the number of referrals made to special education. Possible next steps can include:

- Add Director of Trauma-Informed Support and Services, and an Assistant Director of Social Work
- Add School Instructional Support staff (2-4 to support across 39 schools)
- Add Special Education Coaches (Elementary, Middle School, and High School)
- Move the New Compliance Team under Director of School Instructional Supports

c. Out-of-district billing

The following processes have been implemented to ensure that we are reviewing and validating invoices from out-of-district providers.

- The Senior Executive Director meets with the OOD team weekly, as well as the Finance team to review invoices and ensure accuracy.
- The Out of District Director (ODD) and her team meet monthly with the Finance team to review and communicate questions or concerns to the sending program.

Plan for issuing comprehensive RFP placed on hold

Hartford Public Schools will place this RFP on hold. As we work to develop our COVID Recovery Plan for 21-22 and beyond, it is important to focus our work on the District Model of Excellence and the work district leaders have and continue to do this school year. When we have a solid understanding of Federal guidelines (funding, State Assessments, and vaccinations), we will be better equipped to make informed decisions on strategic priorities that will bear long-term implications on our financial sustainability.