

APPROVED
STATE OF CONNECTICUT
MUNICIPAL ACCOUNTABILITY REVIEW BOARD (MARB)

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
Hartford Subcommittee of the MARB

Meeting Date and Time: Thursday, March 25, 2021 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Meeting Location: This was a virtual 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: 776 214 004

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

City Officials in Attendance: Jennifer Hockenull, Superintendent Torres-Rodriguez

OPM Staff in Attendance: Julian Freund

Others in Attendance: Patrick Gibson (School and State Finance Project)

I. Call to Order & Opening Remarks

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

II. Approval of Minutes:

a. January 28, 2021 regular meeting

A motion was made by Ms. Shaw, with a second by Mr. White, to approve the minutes with one correction to attribute a comment at the beginning of the last paragraph under Item IV. The motion passed unanimously.

III. Board of Education FY 2022 Recommended Budget

Superintendent Torres-Rodriguez presented the Recommended FY 2022 Budget to the Subcommittee. The budget relies on use of a portion of ESSER funding to make up for anticipated increases in ECS that have not materialized. The budget also includes several options for reducing expenditures if the final adopted State budget reduces Education aid below the amounts recommended in the Governor's budget. Data showing district enrollment declining since 2014 was shown. Per pupil funding in schools with less than 300 students appears to be about twice as much as schools with 500 to 600 students. The methodology for ensuring equitable funding across schools was described. The trend in tuition expense was shown to have decreased from 11% per year to about 5% per year over the last few years. Overall funding levels for the district are relatively flat when taking into consideration the Committed Fund Balance that will be available in FY 2022. The most significant cost increase in the budget is out-of-district tuition. The increase is more than offset by a reduction in insurance and fringe benefits.

IV. Update: Special Education Data Collection

Mr. Gibson reviewed a memo he had prepared regarding challenges in projecting special education student needs and resources. He identified two essential issues regarding special education tuition and provision of special education services in Hartford. The quantity of students entering and leaving the district each year through School Choice options and significant year over year special education tuition cost increases.

Mr. Waxenberg questioned whether the percentage of Hartford students in the Open Choice system who are identified for special education program is in alignment with the overall percentage of special education students. Some of the data needed to answer that question has not been provided yet. Oversight and monitoring of placement and services provided is limited, due in part to lack of resources for oversight and monitoring. Ms. Kennison asked if the Superintendent could begin to build resources for more intensive monitoring. The Superintendent explained that current efforts are focused internally on ensuring that the district itself is not over-reliant on special education placements. Mr. Waxenberg suggested that, instead of a consultant study, an investigation by the State Department of Education to determine if there holes in reporting requirements or if there are procedural or policy aspects of the Open Choice system that incentivize receiving districts to over-identify special education students. Ms. Shaw raised the possibility of the MARB taking a formal assessment or position on the issue to the Governor and other stakeholders.

V. Update: Corrective Action Plan

The written monthly update was provided with the agenda and meeting materials.

VI. Other Related Business

There was no other business.

VII. Adjourn

Mr. Waxenberg made a motion to adjourn, with a second by Ms. Shaw. The meeting adjourned at 12:02 PM.