



Special Meeting- Budget Workshop
Avon Board of Education
34 Simsbury Road, Avon, Connecticut

Mission Statement

Our mission is to inspire in each student a joy and passion for learning and a commitment to excellence, personal integrity, and social responsibility.

Wednesday, January 10, 2024, 6:00 pm

Avon High School, Library

Avon High School
510 West Avon Road
Avon, CT 06001

Minutes

Board Members Present: Christopher Campbell; Debra Chute, Board Chair; Jeffrey S. Fleischman, Board Secretary; Ramesh Kandipilli; Lynn Katz, Nicole Russo; Thej Singh, Board Vice-Chair; Suzanne Szekeres; Sarah Thompson

Board Members Absent: none

Administration Present: Dr. Bridget Heston Carnemolla, Superintendent of Schools; Roberto Medic, Director of Human Resources; Jess Giannini, Assistant Superintendent; Susan Russo, Business Manager

I. **Call to Order** Superintendent Carnemolla, called the Special Budget Workshop meeting to order at 6:02 pm.

II. **New Business**

Dr. Carnemolla introduced tonight's meeting as the second of the Board of Education budget workshops for the fiscal year. The Superintendent's intentions were to go through the presentation on the Superintendent's Proposed Budget for FY 2024-2025 and address any questions and/or concerns before the January 16th Board meeting where the Board will take action on the budget. The overall number is not expected to change from now until Tuesday the 16th, but some items are still fluid and will be updated electronically and then posted for Tuesday's meeting with the public. The town of Avon needs to plan their budget, so they expect the APS budget to be in their hands for February 2, 2024.

Dr. Carnemolla thanked all the Administrators for being there.

Dr. C started with the mission statement, stating that when the budget is put together the mission statement and the Blueprint for Excellence is always the guide for composing the budget.

The Superintendent's Proposed Budget for FY 2024-2025 presentation:

Budget terms were clarified; Gross Budget- Total amount of funding requested from the town
Non-tax revenue - Revenue collected by the BOE on behalf of the town
(Open Choice grants, Athletic Pay to Participate, Parking Fees and Pre-K tuition to name a few)

Net Budget - General fund operating expenses less non-tax revenue

The way the Board of Education Budget goes , the appropriations have to be made to BOE; the town takes in the money and then appropriates it to us at the beginning of the new fiscal year.

2024/2025 Budget Overview

2023-2024 vs. 2024-2025

2023/2024 Gross Budget - \$66,743,809

less non-tax revenue - \$ 4,267,161

2023/2024 Net Budget - \$62,476,648

Proposed 2024/2025 Gross Budget - **\$70,121,345**

Gross % Increase - **5.06%**

Gross Difference in Dollars \$ 3,377,536

less non-tax revenue - \$ 4,439,019

2022/2023 fund offset 100,588

Net Budget Increase - **\$65,581,738**

or

Net Budget % Increase **4.97%**

Net Difference in Dollars 24/25 \$ 3,105,089

Dr. Carnemolla started with giving the ‘Big Picture’ of the budget. Salaries and benefits are always the largest part of a budget, and any school district, on average, would have about 80% of their budget be for salaries and benefits. Avon is right on target at 83%.

Tuition has increased as well, especially the Special Education students that are going out of our district for their education. We always try to accommodate the needs of our students in house, but sometimes there are a handful of students that need to go to different facilities because unfortunately we can’t suit their needs. Transportation is included in this line as well, as we need to transport these students to the other educational facilities.

Contracted Services is another item that we are asked about. A number of things are included in this line, such as Athletic officials, medical needs of a student, sometimes building and grounds. Anything we contract from the outside. Most of it is for Special Education.

Question was posed by a board member about the percent of the budget that is tuition costs, and is that typical? Dr. Carnemolla answered that it is hard to compare to other school districts as the larger ones may have the ability to have more in house programs for students because the population of students that need these programs is larger. But typically, in the last few years we have seen more and more students come in with greater need and that number does not have the likelihood of going down. Another Board member asked if it would be more cost effective to service our students in house instead of sending them to different schools and paying tuition, and Dr. Carnemolla said it is always our first choice to have the students stay in Avon, and we are fortunate to have an OT, PT and others to service students full time. We would rather spend on Contracted Services to have the student stay in Avon, then send them to outplacements but sometimes it is necessary.

Dr. Carnemolla then went through the large ‘drivers’ of the increased budget (fixed costs):
(Salaries are not within the fixed costs below to show what drives the budget outside of salaries)

Increases:

- Health Insurance: \$938,301
- All Other Benefits: (SS, Disability etc.): \$111,517
- Transportation \$ 76,583
- Software \$188,118
- Special Education \$517,146

Total Fixed Cost Increases- \$1,831,665 or 2.74%

Health Insurance has gone up as the projection is based on actual claims (procedures/doctor visits/Pharmaceutical) and that has risen considerably this past year.

Being self insured, is this the most cost effective way to go with health insurance, was asked by a board member. Ms. Russo answered that every year that insurance is looked at and put out to bid, being self insured is still the most cost effective way to go for Avon tax payers as well as Avon School District employees.

A Board member asked what can be done to bring down health insurance costs and Ms. Susan Russo explained how they always still negotiate the terms of the agreement and educate employees on wellness.

A Board member asked about part time employees getting benefits and Mr. Giannini answered that the part-time certified staff is offered the benefits but the percentage to pay for their portion is different. Part-time non-certified staff are not offered benefits.

A few more clarifying questions were asked about Health Insurance.

Software is technology and educational based. In 2024 much of our lives is technology based so software becomes a larger portion of the budget.

Board member asked if we monitor what software is being used and what is not being used and Ms. Susan Russo answered that the IT department is always monitoring logins and usage of all software to keep the ones we need and get rid of the ones we don’t use enough.

Dr.. Carnemolla wanted to reiterate that the Special Education number is not staffing, but all the other items like equipment, contracted services and transportation.

A board member questioned if what you project for SPED is always enough and stays that number for the year? Dr. Carnemolla answered we can only project forward with what we have now, and if someone moves into the district that has needs we need to fix line items and find the money to pay for those needs.

A few clarifying questions were posed by the board so they could fully understand the Special Education line item.

Dr. Carnemolla went on to talk about staffing:

Contractual Salary Obligations	\$1,158,172 or 1/74%
Increases in:Gross Wage Increases	
Step movement	
Degree/Lane Changes	
Staffing Additions 23/34 and 24/25	\$582,117 or 0.87%
Social Worker	
Teaching Assistants	
Paraeducators	
PreSchool Teacher	

Board members posed questions to help clarify this segment of the budget. ESY questions were asked about the length of the program and what the program entails.

There are a few savings to the budget as well:

Decreases:

- Utilities (\$128,064)
- Supplies and Equipment: (\$ 21,930)

Board member stated that she doesn't see where we would cut, but are other towns as high for an increase? Dr. Carnemolla answered that we are ahead of many other towns in our budget process, so we are not sure at this point. But at this point, right now, word from colleagues is we are in the range, or lower than many other towns.

An Educational Cost Sharing question was posed, regarding what we are supposed to receive from the state.

Susan Russo answered that the ECS revenue goes directly to the town so it does not come into play in our budget process.

A board member inquired about Unified Sports and other enhancements. Susan Russo answered that Unified Sports is already wrapped into the line items in Athletics and other enhancements are wrapped into the larger line items in the budget (upgrades to the HS auditorium/purchasing of instruments/storage and more).

Professional Development questions were posed to clarify how PD is facilitated and how the number was developed for this line item.

Question posed by a board member regarding shifting the budget numbers if the Science of Reading waiver does not go through and we have to purchase a reading program, Dr. Carnemolla answered that the money projected for the Science of Reading was taken out because we have grant money coming from the Right to Read Act, as well as an Open Choice Grant that we receive that has to be utilized on all students and that is where we can pull money from as well.

Question by a board member about the Choice funds and how the percentage is decided that needs to be spent on just the Open Choice students. The question was answered that it depends on how many choice students we have in Avon, and we get an acceptance fund to be just spent on the Open Choice students.

Ms. Susan Russo and Dr. Carnemolla made more clarifications on Open Choice Grants.

A short discussion ensued about enhancements for the schools in the budget.

A Board member commented that he appreciated the thought and care that went into the budget, and that he agreed that there is nothing that can be taken out of the budget at this point, without it hurting the students.

A Board member asked what is not in the budget that we still need. Dr. Carnemolla answered that another custodian is something that generally keeps getting cut from the budget. Several board members commented that if it doesn't make a huge difference in the overall percentage in the budget maybe it should be added back in. A discussion ensued regarding the topic of the need for a

custodian and a few other needs that did not make it into this budget, like another SRO, another security guard and another Social Worker.

IV. Adjournment

Ms. Deb Chute her appreciation for making all the information available to them and answering their questions. Dr. Carnemolla stressed for any Board member with remaining questions, concerns or ideas to reach out to her prior to the January 16th Board meeting.

Deb Chute moved to adjourn the meeting; Jeffrey Fleischman seconded. At 8:27 pm, the meeting adjourned by unanimous consent.

Minutes prepared by Christine Sardinkas, Board Recording Secretary

Minutes respectfully submitted by Jeffrey S. Fleischman, Board Secretary