



Legislation Text

File #: 23-1204, Version: 1

PRESENTATION

Presentation:

- Board of Education proposed Fiscal Year 2023/2024 Budget

Meeting Action Detail:

Town Council Meeting 03/08/2023

File #: [231204](#) Version: 11

Type: Presentation

Title: Board of Education proposed Fiscal Year 2023/2024 Budget

Minute Note:

Superintendent of Schools Jason Hartling presented the Board of Education's proposed Fiscal Year 2023/2024 Budget in the amount of \$35,908,368. This was an increase of \$1,353,048 or 3.92% over the current Fiscal Year 2022/2023 Budget.

Mr. Hartling began by discussing the increasing needs of students. He explained that the three characteristics of their at-risk students were:

- Poverty
- Disability
- Language acquisition

Mr. Hartling stated over the last ten years, even prior to the Covid-19 Pandemic, that there has been a dramatic change of the profile of the students entering Ledyard Public Schools. He stated this has caused the District to reformulate how they approach the needs that their students that were coming-in, with beginning in Kindergarten and matriculating thru their years in Ledyard Public Schools. He reviewed "*Students Needs Chart*" (please see attached presentation) noting the following:

Blue Metric - Illustrated the work Ledyard has done to stabilize the increase of needs by appropriately identifying their students and providing them with the services that would eventually allow them to exit out of the special education program if appropriate.

Orange Metric: Illustrated the Free or Reduced Lunch population which was over 30% for this current school year. Mr. Hartling explained that the State of Connecticut and Federal Government used the Free or Reduced Lunch population to measure the level of poverty in the community. He stated that he believed that this number was 5% - 6% less than what it should be, explaining that some families who were on the margin were resistant to returning the Free and Reduced Lunch Forms back to the school because they did not think they would qualify. Therefore, he stated the Central Office has continued to work to encourage families to fill out the Free or Reduced Lunch Forms and to get them back to the schools, so that they could have a better representation of the poverty rate in Ledyard.

Mr. Hartling continued by noting the drop in that poverty level metric during 2021-2022 coincided with the State providing free lunch for all students because of the Covid-19 Pandemic. However, he noted by the State providing free lunch to all students during the Pandemic that it removed any incentive to encourage families to complete the Free or Reduced Lunch Forms.

Mr. Hartling addressed the importance of the Free and Reduced Lunch metric explaining that this number was part of the formula that drives the State's Education Cost Sharing (ECS) funding to the town. He stated that it was also the number that the Federal Government used to award Federal Grants to Ledyard, and that it would become a qualifier for a lot of other additional funding sources.

Mr. Hartling went on to note in years past the Town Council was focused on Impact Aid Funding and he stated because of the Central Office's efforts, Ledyard has had some significant growth in that number. However, he stated the Free and Reduced Lunch Forms were as impactful if not more than the Impact Aid Form. However, he stated the Free and Reduced Lunch Forms were little more personal because they were asking people what they earned.

- **Red Column** showed the percentage of students *Not Meeting the Achievement Standard*.

Mr. Hartling stated in many of their grade levels they were seeing almost 50% of their students not at Standard by the State's Measure. He stated this was one measurement of student growth and achievement, however, he stated it was an important summary of how the year ended. He stated because it was a single year snapshot that these numbers were not cohorts and so they could not compare third grade to forty grade, etc. He stated Ledyard Public Schools was working to minimize the number of students that were *Approaching* and *Not Meeting Achievement* as illustrated the Yellow and Red Columns.

Mr. Hartling explained because they could not hire enough Interventionist to solve this problem alone, that they were looking to attack it in both daily instruction, which they would call a Tier I Intervention, explaining that this was what every student received, as well as providing the Tier III Intervention, for students who were in Red Column.

Mr. Hartling stated Ledyard Public Schools has done significant overhauls in both their English Language Arts (Reading) and Math Curriculum. He stated in their programmatic approach they have added multiple science-based programs to assist them in the instruction of the students overall, which has had a great effect, noting that they were seeing positive changes and improvements in student achievements, but that they still had a long way to go.

- **Staffing**

Mr. Hartling stated understanding Ledyard Public Schools Teachers, Staff, and every Member of the Team were working incredibly hard and incredibly efficient to get the gains that they were getting; that they did not have enough to do what they need to do for the student profile and based on the academic needs they have in Ledyard moving forward.

Mr. Hartling stated although he did not like to make comparisons that he wanted to present two charts regarding other towns in Southeastern Connecticut:

- ***Student Achievement***

Mr. Hartling reviewed the Smarter Balance Achievement Consortium English Language Arts and the Math (SBAC Charts) (please see attached presentation).

Mr. Hartling noted these Chart were a representation of Student Achievement as measured by the State Assessment. He explained the following:

- **Purple Column** showed the percentage of students that were *At or Above the Achievement Standard*.
- **Yellow Column** showed the percentage of students that were *Approaching Achievement Standard*.
- **Red Column** showed the percentage of students *Not Meeting the Achievement Standard*.

Mr. Hartling stated in many of their grade levels they were seeing almost 50% of their students not at Standard by the State's Measure. He stated this was one measurement of student growth and achievement, however, he stated it was an important summary of how the year ended. He stated because it was a single year snapshot that these numbers were not cohorts and so they could not compare third grade to forty grade, etc. He stated Ledyard Public Schools was working to minimize the number of students that were *Approaching* and *Not Meeting Achievement* as illustrated the Yellow and Red Columns.

Mr. Hartling explained because they could not hire enough Interventionist to solve this problem alone, that they were looking to attack it in both daily instruction, which they would call a Tier I Intervention, explaining that this was what every student received, as well as providing the Tier III Intervention, for students who were in Red Column.

Mr. Hartling stated Ledyard Public Schools has done significant overhauls in both their English Language Arts (Reading) and Math Curriculum. He stated in their programmatic approach they have added multiple science-based programs to assist them in the instruction of the students overall, which has had a great effect, noting that they were seeing positive changes and improvements in student achievements, but that they still had a long way to go.

- ***Staffing***

Mr. Hartling stated understanding Ledyard Public Schools Teachers, Staff, and every Member of the Team were working incredibly hard and incredibly efficient to get the gains that they were getting; that they did not have enough to do what they need to do for the student profile and based on the academic needs they have in Ledyard moving forward.

Mr. Hartling stated although he did not like to make comparisons that he wanted to present two charts regarding other towns in Southeastern Connecticut (please see attached presentation).

Mr. Hartling stated he broke these charts out based on Staff. He noted the following:

- Certified Student Support Staff - Special Education Team and Mental Health Professionals. Mr. Hartling stated Ledyard had 500 more students than Montville; however, Ledyard had 0.6 less of a staff person than Montville.
- General Education Staff - Classroom Teachers - Mr. Hartling stated Ledyard had 40 less Teachers compared to East Lyme (East Lyme had 194 students more than Ledyard).
- Per Pupil Expenditure - Mr. Hartling noted that Stonington's per pupil expenditure was \$1,000 more than Ledyard's per pupil. He stated if Ledyard were to increase its per pupil expenditure to the same level as Stonington that it would put Ledyard's education funding at \$2.5 million, which would amount to about forty more staff members to serve Ledyard's students.

Mr. Hartling stated because of these differences in Certified Staffing and General Education Staffing that they see the impact in a variety of ways, noting that it was not only in the interventions and the individual classroom, but in the programmatic offerings they could provide to Ledyard students. He also noted the comparison in the number of Paraprofessionals and other staffing, noting that Ledyard was being incredibly efficient. He stated that he was only raising these comparisons to help folks clearly understand how hard the Educational Team was working to serve the kids in Ledyard. He stated seeing this data added that perspective as they look to improve things and to improve student outcomes.

- ***Enrollment***

Mr. Hartling stated prior to his arrival in Ledyard seven years ago, the conversation relative to the Board of Education's budget was *enrollment*. He stated they used *enrollment* as the metric for funding without closely examining the other data points, which was student needs. He noted at the Town Council's January 25, 2023 meeting Mayor Allyn, III, mentioned that Ledyard was the fastest growing town in New London County with a 2.4% population increase over the last decade. Mr. Hartling stated Ledyard was going to see an increase in student enrollment over the next several years, particularly as Developments come on-line. He stated Ledyard student enrollment has remained relatively flat over the last several years with the exception of the Covid-19 Pandemic year, where they had a large number of students that temporarily moved to home schooling.

❖ ***Budget Priorities:***

Mr. Hartling provided an overview of the Budget Priorities as follows:

- ✓ Continue the evolution of K-5 literacy and numeracy instruction and the professional growth of their educators. Mr. Hartling stated they did not use a broad brush noting that they focused on the two elementary schools investing in literacy and numeracy curriculums, and professional development staff.

Mr. Hartling went on to explain that the Board of Education did other work that did not have a dollar ticket attached to it at the High School and Middle School. He stated they received the Department of Defense Education Activity (DODEA) Grant for mathematics instruction, which helped them accelerate their work in the Middle School, around intervention and curriculum pieces, noting that they would continue to build on these initiatives.

- ✓ Continue enhancements and evolution of the intervention model and expand serve capacity.

Mr. Hartling explained their Intervention Model for the students that were *Below Achievement* (Red Column) as noted in in the Smarter Balance Achievement Consortium English Language Arts (SBAC) Chart that he reviewed earlier this evening. He stated these students could be 2 - 3 years below level and required a Tier III Intervention, which was a specialized numeracy or literacy teacher, who worked with students to build their skill banks so that they could access the instruction in their classroom.

- ✓ Mr. Hartling stated for the students that were *Approaching Achievement* as noted in in the Smarter Balance Achievement Consortium (SBAC) Charts (Yellow Column) that the classroom teachers were using time each day to work on targeted skills.

Mr. Hartling went on to explain as teachers face more challenges and uniqueness in their classrooms that they have to provide them with the professional support and professional growth so that they could begin to approach those problems with different methods and different techniques. He stated that they were looking to achieve this thru a Coaching Model.

- ✓ Continue to address and ameliorate achievement gaps and the number of students below basic

Mr. Hartling stated it was their moral imperative to make sure that 50% of Ledyard students were not falling behind or multiple years behind as they progress thru the system. He stated when they fail to do that they also accelerate a dynamic where they allocate more and more dollars to intervention and special education because they did not deal with the problem appropriately early enough. Therefore, he stated they wanted to continue to significantly reduce the number of students that were *Below Achievement* (Red Column) and *Approaching Achievement* (Yellow Colum) as noted in in the Smarter Balance Achievement Consortium (SBAC) Charts. He stated once they reduce these numbers that they could being to talk about expanding the Gifted and Talented and other Programs. He stated this was the District's Long-Term Strategy for growth.

❖ *District Needs*

Mr. Hartling stated as they have been doing for past few years the Board of Education has continued their “*Needs Assessment*” activities with the Administrators of each school to prioritize their request and needs. He although many of items in the **yellow** area were important, that they: (1) May not be able to secure funding; (2) May not be able to secure staffing; or (3) May not have the structure in place to fully utilize the program.

Mr. Hartling stated when they were looking at a finite resource environment that he wanted to make sure every dollar they spend had the best utilization and would have the highest impact for students. He stated as much as he would like to have all of the items on the List for their kids tomorrow that because of the realties they face, they did not make it into next year's proposed budget. However, he noted the importance to include these needs in the Board of Education's proposed Fiscal Year 2023/2024 Budget presentation so

that the Town Council and the Board of Education understood where they were going and what they would like to see long-term. He stated all of these items were an investment and would cost \$2.8 million, which was roughly where they be if they were funding the education budget at the same level as Stonington.

Mr. Hartling stated as the School District has invested in improvements that they have made sure that they had the leadership, coaching, and training in place so that they were successful interventions. He presented the “District Needs” list noting that they were color coded to identify their priority (please see attached presentation).

❖ **Budget Expenditures:**

Mr. Hartling reviewed a pie chart regarding the Budget Expenditure Breakdown noting the following (please see attached presentation)

- 73.8 % Salary and Wages
- 2.5% Utilities
- Supplies 3.7%
- 2.9% Special Education
- 4.4% Transportation
- 3.4% Other Purchases Services
- 1.9% Purchases Property Services
- 2.9% Professional Technology
- 2.3% Insurance and Benefits (*This does not include Healthcare costs. The healthcare costs are carried on the General Government side of the Ledger*)

Mr. Hartling stated that the Education Budget was experiencing inflation pressures. He stated that they were working to mitigate some of the increased expenses thru some purchases for electrical, some utilities, and fuel. He stated by reducing bus routes and negotiating solid increases, that they have been able to reduce transportation costs, noting that they were paying the same amount for transportation this year as they did in 2008. He stated because they have consolidated everywhere they could to mitigate costs that Ledyard’s Buses were jammed packed. However, he stated for the Fiscal Year 2024/2025 that they would have to go out to bid for transportation.

❖ **Projected Revenues:**

Mr. Hartling reviewed the Board of Education’s Projected Funding Sources as follows:

- 59.1% Town Appropriation (Tax Revenue)
- 31.7% Education Cost Sharing - Mr. Hartling noted they would see a slight increase in the ECS Funding.
- 4.2 % Impact Aid - Mr. Hartling stated Ledyard has maximized their Impact Aid working hard to increase awareness in the value of completing the request forms to identify eligible families
- 4.4% Agri-Science

- 0.6% Non-Resident Tuition

❖ **Key Budget Changes:**

- Savings related to six (6.0) known teacher retirements (FTEs retained).
- Three (3) FTE District-Wide Interventionists for Literacy - This would bring the staffing level back up to the 2015 staffing level.
- One (1.0) FTE elementary level Instructional Coach
- One (1.0) FTE District-Wide EL Teacher (English as an additional language) - Mr. Hartling stated when he came to Ledyard seven years ago they had nine students who were learning English as their second or third language; and he noted that they were projecting to have forty-five students next year. He stated they were currently servicing this need with one teacher and one tutor; which was the reason they have added an additional English Language teacher into next year's proposed budget.
- Two Kindergarten Paraprofessionals - Mr. Hartling stated currently the Paraprofessionals have been moving between classrooms. He explained with the increasing social emotional needs of Kindergartners entering into the school districts the two additional Paraprofessionals was a critical path item that they needed to add into the budget for next year.
- Updated Athletic Trainer position transition from a stipend to staff - Mr. Hartling stated because of the Covid-19 Pandemic Athletic Training has become a significant challenge. He stated the old model where the schools would partner with an orthopedic group on a part-time basis was gone. He stated everyone in the region was now required to hire a full-time Athletic Trainer. Therefore, he stated this budget expense had to be increased to provide an athletic trainer for the High School athletes.
- Out of warrantee replacements for SMART boards/projectors - Mr. Hartling stated about \$30,000 was included in the Fiscal Year 2023/2024 Budget to replace failing technology in the classrooms that was out of warrantee.
- Increase in required Special Educational Services - Mr. Hartling stated they have had some changes relative to the services for their youth *in-need* that they were working to manage their profile; and therefore, additional special education services were needed for some of their high need out placements.

Mr. Hartling concluded his presentation by providing a recap stating the Board of Education's proposed Fiscal Year 2023/2024 Budget in the amount of \$35,908,368, was an increase of \$1,353,048 or 3.92% over the current Fiscal Year 2022/2023 Budget. He stated this was the largest budget increase he has presented to the Town Council. He stated when the Board of Education began the budget preparation process that the budget came in with an 8% increase. He stated that they worked to minimize the increase to the 3.92% increase as presented this evening, noting that Ledyard's education budget increase was below average relative to the increases that were being published in the State of Connecticut. He stated there was one town in Connecticut that presented their education budget and that their elected officials added \$1 million to the budget. He stated this particular town had 50 more teachers to serve roughly the same student population that Ledyard has. He stated the Ledyard Board of Education has presented a responsible and ambitious Fiscal Year 2023/2024 Budget to make sure they were serving the students as they deserve to be served; and that they can continue their work around ameliorating the achievement and opportunity gap in the community. He stated as volunteer elected officials that he understood the difficult decisions that the Town Council has to make, noting that this

was a challenging time.

Mr. Hartling stated that he would be happy to answer questions this evening and that he was always available should a Town Councilor like to meet with him to discuss any questions they may have regarding specific areas of Ledyard Public Schools, noting that they would take any ideas or perspectives.

Councilor McGrattan noted during his budget presentation Mr. Hartling mentioned that when kids start off behind it was difficult to catch up and that it then becomes very expensive. Therefore, she questioned whether there was anything the town could do to identify some of the children who were not ready to go to Kindergarten.

Superintendent of Schools Mr. Hartling responded to Councilor McGrattan's question by stating that Ledyard had a good handle on students as they make the transition into the School District's Pre-K Program. He stated they have a limited number of high-quality Pre-K slots and that he believed they were doing a good job there. He noted the *District Needs Chart* that he presented earlier this evening included some provisions to set up for the Transition to Kindergarten, noting the cost would be about \$180,000. He explained the reason it was listed in the yellow section of the *District Needs Chart* was because he did not have the space, noting that the elementary schools were incredibly tight. He stated they moved a piece of the Library out of the Gallup Hill School to put in a Pre-K Classroom, noting that space was going to be a concern as they looked to add any programming.

Councilor McGrattan questioned where the forty-five children who do not speak English were from. Mr. Hartling stated the non-English speaking children were coming from all over, noting that next year they would have children that were speaking nine different languages. He stated the one teacher and one tutor have been moving from school to school to work with the children. He stated the professionals that work with the students transitioning into Ledyard Public Schools had an amazing skill set.

Councilor Saums addressed the Coaching Model that Mr. Hartling described designed to provide teachers with the professional support to learn how to address the many challenges and uniqueness in their classrooms. He stated adults receiving coaching or perceiving the approach of coaching for the first time were generally resistant to it. He stated that he was a huge fan of coaching for adults and that he thought using coaching was a great way for the Board of Education to make the best use the resources they had.

Mr. Hartling stated the idea of coaching was not intended to fix people who were not doing what they were supposed to be doing. He stated coaching was intended to get their best to be even better; and to recognize the new challenges that were in front of them. He stated that Councilor Saums was correct in that there can be some resistance when organizations muddy coaching with evaluation; or when they focus solely on poor performers. He stated the Administration has been alert to those types of pitfalls and he noted that the teachers have been receptive and demanding of the Administration to make sure that they receive job embedded coaching. He stated they have done this with their curriculum implementation, particularly with math, noting that they pursued a different model. He stated they have seen great success where their interventionist also worked as part of the curriculum coaching. He stated Ledyard's teachers were amazing professionals and that they responded very well to the coaching, noting that they were hungry to get new ideas and to think about the work in a different way for the benefit of their students.

Councilor Irwin stated the Board of Education has been investing in literacy and numeracy for a while now; and he questioned whether they had a sense of how much those numbers have moved because of the town's

investment. Mr. Hartling stated the wildcard has been the Covid-19 Pandemic. He stated Ledyard did not see the type of loss that other school districts saw during the pandemic, which was a positive. He stated the other factor which was difficult to control was the increasing need. He explained that Ledyard has been able to stop the slide that was happening and that they were beginning to see other positive data points in student growth and gains this year. He stated it was fair to say that they have mitigated the downward slide and they were beginning to see a positive up-tick. He stated what was not represented on the *Student Achievement Charts* was the gap they were closing in the K-2 students.

Councilor Irwin addressed Mr. Hartling's comments that the buildings space was tight and the need for more faculty/instructors; therefore, he questioned how much space Ledyard had for additional personnel. Mr. Hartling stated that they have added some additional learning space by working with Fire Marshall Jim Mann and the Director of Buildings and Facilities Wayne Donaldson to make some instructional cubbies. He also noted one classroom, with dividers, was being used by four or five adults to provide intervention to students. He stated the *coaches* would be using individual teacher classrooms during the day. He stated the space was tight, but that this was some of the challenges of the State's reimbursement programs for school building projects. He stated that they were managing the best they could and that he was trying to avoid the very expensive set-up of portable classrooms. Councilor Irwin thanked Mr. Hartling for his informative budget presentation.

Chairman Dombrowski thanked Mr. Hartling and the members of the Board of Education who were present for attending tonight's meeting and for their hard work in putting together the Board of Education's proposed Fiscal Year 2023/2024 Budget. He stated although no one wanted to see an increase, that they also have to recognize that they have been holding the line for many years and knew at some point they were going to see a bigger increase. He stated he believed the Board of Education put together a responsible budget for next year.