The Special Education Committee Meeting of the Board of Education was held at the Blake Building, 25 Ogden Street, West Haven. The meeting was called to order by George Monahan, Chairman of the Special Education Committee at 6:00 p.m.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:  George Monahan, Chairman
                                      Gerald Calabritto
                                      Eric Murillo

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:  Krista Pickering

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:  M. Toni Paine
                                      Robert Guthrie
                                      Howard Horvath Jr.

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:  Mark Palmieri
                                      Raymond Collins

ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT:  Dr. JoAnn Andrees, Superintendent of Schools
                                      Neil Cavallaro, Assistant Superintendent

George Monahan, Chairman of the Board of Education Special Education Committee called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. The meeting began with a pledge to the flag.

Mr. Monahan stated that a meeting was called to basically to get a report from the Department with a forecast of either good news or potential problems along with an update on financial issues. The complexity of the Special Education Department is one that can change overnight. He then turned the floor over to Mr. Gary Palermo.

Mr. Palermo gave an overview of the Special Education Department stating the kind of services offered and then he discussed finances.

This Department services children between the ages of three and 21. They are mandated by the State to have children enrolled in a Special Education Program by their third birthday. They house students in all the buildings in West Haven and many facilities throughout the state. They receive children’s names from birth to three. As long as a parent or guardian of the child lives in West Haven the City of West Haven becomes responsible. The legal term for this is NEXUS. Some children are placed out of State. The majority of students are placed in regular classrooms with support. Some students are in self contained classroom at Pagels and Forest at the elementary level. At Pagels we also have a program for children with autism. We have seen more children with
autism and this seems to be a national trend. Some students who need a significant amount of care are placed at Pagels. We also have a Special Education Program at the high school. We have developed an integrated sports program at the high school and Jon Capone has done a wonderful job. Our goal is to educate our Special Ed students in the least restrictive environment. If they live in the Molloy district those students would attend Molloy School and we would bring them service. We also have a transition program at the high school and we match students with local employers to help them receive job skills and functional skills. Many of our 18 to 21 year old students are involved in this type of program.

Last year we moved staff around to create a great program for students with specialized needs; some were unable to speak and some were in wheelchairs. Prior to this they may have had to attend a different specialize school. This presented a cost savings to the District.

There are 35 Special Education students placed out of District that attend Magnet Schools. Once accepted to this program we are required to financially support students in these programs in New Haven. Kathy Cassell, Tom Lally and I monitor these programs.

There are 49 Regular Ed students at the Sound School and the cost for the Regular Ed students do come out of the Special Ed Budget.

This year with 49 students at the Sound School we pay $343,000.00 for them to attend. We have four Special Education students at the Sound School and we pay $63,000.00. This totals a little in excess of $400,000.00.

Last year in 05/06 the District had 36 Regular Ed students at the Sound School and four Special Education students. The total cost for this was $317,000.00. We are up over $100,000.00 this year.

The year before last in 04/05 we had 33 Regular Ed students for a total of $219,000.00.

We have students that we are servicing out of the District. This year we had 24 students placed by the Dept. of Children and Families placed in Residential Facilities, Treatment Facilities, Foster Care and Detention Facilities. These students cost us $900,000.00.

We are transporting students throughout the state and the West Hartford American School for the Deaf is probably the longest transportation run for us at the moment.

We try to have family involvement and keep an open door policy with parents. We try to be an asset to parents and anticipate their needs.

A Speech Pathologist has resigned last week to go to another district and we need to fill this position as soon as possible.
The tuition account and transportation accounts are good but it is still early in the year and students could move into the district or display behaviors that need immediate assistance such as suicide idealization, behaviors toward self injury, aggressive behavior and areas of this type. We always try to intervene immediately with the first signs of these types of behaviors. Our ultimate goal always is to have our students who attend schools out of district return to our district.

We also have 3 Special Ed classrooms at Stiles. Upstairs is the middle and high school grouping. We have 5 students in the middle school grouping and 12 students in the high school grouping. These students have behavior problems. They are Special Ed students who may have been labeled emotionally disturbed for the most part. They need a small environment with a lot of support.

Our Pupil Services staff reaches out to all students in all grades. In the lower grades we have issues of fighting and bullying and we try to be proactive with the entire group so that when they get older hopefully we will see less of these issues. We are far reaching as there are 700 plus Special Education Students in West Haven. We support students in need regardless of disability. We also support the parochial schools in our District: St. Lawrence, Our Lady of Victory, Living Word and Notre Dame.

Toni Paine asked what the number of 35 students that are placed outside our district is down from last year. Gary responded that we are still in excess of 100 students. Those 35 were children placed by the Dept. of Children and Families. Excuse me there are 24 placed by the Dept. of Children and Families and 35 are Magnet Special Ed. These 59 students we have no say in.

Neil Cavallaro brought up the following which he feels is very important. When Dr. Andrees and he met with the legislature about a month ago that was a concern we expressed to them and something that they were not aware of. Senator Hart commented that she thought DCF had money put aside for these students. She was shocked. We explained to her that when a family moves to West Haven and a child is placed into one of these facilities it will be at our expense. It is our hope from the reaction we received that something will be done.

Being down 25 paras we have had to be very creative in how we are assigning our paraprofessionals especially with those students who need one on one or a very specific service. All of our building principals are doing a very nice job.

George Monahan stated that before opening this meeting up to questions he did extend an invitation through Gary to any member of his staff who wanted to come forward and share any information, comments or concerns with this Board. Along with Gary Kathleen Cassell and Tom Lally also came to this meeting.

Tom stated that he was a school psychologist and is now an administrator and last year was the first year he can remember when students were not placed in ACES. He also handles Notre Dame and now has multiple PPT’s that go to Notre Dame even from
Woodbridge, Cheshire, North Haven and Branford. It really doesn’t cost more money but it does draw from our services.

George stated that you mentioned we were responsible for children from three on and he wanted to know how this information came to us. Gary stated we receive a list of students with disabilities in West Haven from a State Agency from birth to three. There is limited information but we can track what child will be coming. We also receive information from the Licensed Day Care Centers and the Readiness Council along with other groups.

George asked if he was comfortable that these agencies and groups do a pretty good job of forecasting this information to us. Gary responded yes and Kathleen Cassell said it is infrequent that we have a child come to us with a severe need that we are not aware of.

George stated he knows during the tour of schools with Dr. Andrees and that at every school that he did go to the Special Education responsibility was very prevalent and understood. Building administrators were quick to point out how they were dealing with this in the classrooms. It was a very good feeling to see the kind of services at the high school that we provide there. There were some possibly some new initiative mentioned. I’m hoping you can jot some of these proactive thoughts down in a memo because we are going into a new budget cycle here and dollars and cents are always going to be a challenge here.

Now, regarding the out placing of Special Ed students to other districts, I know that in my term on the board maybe longer there have always been questions as to how they charge for their services and what kind of accountability is there. Last year we talked about maybe requesting some accountability mainly from the New Haven District. I know there fees are considerable different than what we think they are in turn. Have we had a chance to do anything regarding this?

Kathleen stated that right now we have five Special Ed students in West Haven from other Districts. We are charging the districts this year. We find out how many students are in a group, what the salary is and then we break it down accordingly.

If we have a student that comes from another district to ours we send out a residency package. It is not frequent that we find errors.

Neil stated if a child applies to a magnet school they are taken blind not knowing that they are Special Ed students. So if we were to ever start challenging that we could provide Special Ed services I’m not so sure that we would be doing a good service to that child. We would be denying them that opportunity to attend some of these programs.

George interrupted he was requesting a break down of the bill. How is New Haven charging or just simply requesting them to give us a detailed account of that bill.
George’s last question is about the one example given for the Hartford School for the Deaf. He was curious about the age factor in that case and how much longer is West Haven responsible for this student.

Gary stated it was at another school that we spoke about the extraordinary cost. George stated the transportation cost. Gary stated there are other schools that are much more expensive where we are getting close to graduation.

Gary stated there is money that goes back to the City that we have spoken about in the past. Although the money comes out of our Special Ed Budget a good portion of the money does come back to the City. Usually anything above the $40,000.00 mark comes back to the City for students placed out by the district; more if placed by DCF.

Jerry Calabritto stated if I understand you right your total Special Ed component at Stiles is 17 students. Kathleen responded on the second floor. Second question is I tend to agree with Mr. Monahan. How hard would it be for New Haven to say Student A, B, or C these are the services provided with no names but with some kind of breakdown for what we are paying. Kathleen stated we do get this information. We do get individual bills for kids. Jerry also asked why does the $300,000.00 tuition for Regular Ed students for Sound School come out of the Special Ed Budget. George stated Toni Paine just passed him the same question. Jerry asked if there was a budgetary rationale and maybe we need to clean this up a little bit.

Gary stated what he thinks that historically over the years that the tuition account has included the Sound School students and the Lyman Hall Students and the numbers keep growing and growing and growing and it stayed in that account. Jerry stated maybe in all fairness to their bottom line we could break it out to tuition A and tuition B just in all fairness to your budget.

Dr. Andrees asked Gary to tell the Board about the bill that was just received. Gary stated that they have a student that was at a Special Ed facility in Massachusetts and we received the bill a couple of weeks ago for a year’s tuition totaling $60,000.00 for the last school year. We spent a lot of time and energy with the State verifying the bill. Asking how could this happen a year after and who made the error. The State took a strong stand that the child’s family was here last year and this would constitute a NEXUS. We sent out our own residency out of our office and asked them to go back a year. As I said before we want to be family friendly and these are all our kids in West Haven but we also want to dispute what we haven’t heard of before. A further discussion ensued.

A question of how many Special Ed students graduate from the High School and go on to college. Two students from the Stiles Program graduated last year and one of them went on to school and received some scholarship money. Some students have gone on to Gateway and to Southern. If a student has ADD he or she may need special help as to have the instructions repeated etc. There are special books available with colleges for students with special needs.
Toni Paine stated in getting back to the $60,000.00 bill, the State stated that the parents or one of the parents lived in West Haven last year. They still live in West Haven this year was the response. Gary stated we would have had to pay for this child’s education anyway but it is just when you don’t know you can’t anticipate. Our budget is so flexible just in the next month we could have ten families move to West Haven with children with definite needs and our budget would be in the red.

Tom Lally interjected that the number of students at Stiles will increase by three; two this week and one next week. A further discussion ensued regarding inclusion and when it began.

Howie Horvath was curious about teachers and their sense of how they need to change and deal with the challenges that are being presented. Gary stated when the children are young there is a little gap but as they get older and that child becomes a fourth grader and is still reading at the first grade level, you have the fourth grade over here and that challenge becomes more difficult as the kids get older and you must become more creative. We are asking a lot of the teacher to teach to the group and to also teach to the first grade level readers.

George Monahan stated that the requirements of no child left behind also imposed some additional challenges on the Special Education piece as well.

Gary stated that most of our students are in regular classes 80% of the time and we have been an inclusive district for quite a long time.

Bob Guthrie stated if New Haven puts a Magnet School in West Haven and our residents attend this school is it feasible that our school district will we still have to pay? Hopefully the administration will stay on top of this. A further discussion ensued.

Dr. Andrees thanked Gary Palermo and complemented the Special Ed Staff that works so well with the parents of students that this district has become known to be Special Ed friendly.

George thanked Gary and his caring staff on behalf of the board and stated we really do appreciate the fact that you go above and beyond. We want you to know it is not unnoticed.

Gary said he couldn’t do as well without the help of his two assistants.

George Monahan made a motion to adjourn
Jerry Calabritto seconded the motion
The meeting adjourned at 6:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Marylou Amendola
Board Clerk