

Budget Committee  
Minutes  
January 10, 2012

Present: R. Barnes, T. Beard, M. Beck, R. Buckley, J. Burk, B. Cummings, C. Guagliumi, S. Heinrich, G. Krupp, A. Schneider, R. Swonger and School Board liaison C. Ortega

Excused: C. Barbera

Also present: Superintendent M. Chiafery, Assistant Superintendent Dr. M. McLaughlin, School Business Administrator M. Shevenell and various department heads

A. Schneider called the meeting to order at 7:02 PM and led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance. C. Ortega requested a moment to honor the memory of the Masticola Upper Elementary School student who had passed away over the weekend.

**Approval of Prior Minutes**

S. Heinrich made a MOTION to approve the minutes of November 8, 2011. Second: G. Krupp. MOTION PASSED: 10 – 0 – 2, with C. Guagliumi and R. Swonger abstaining.

**Public Participation I**

There was none.

**Budget Review Process**

A. Schneider gave a brief overview of the Committee liaison and budget review process, including the dates of upcoming meetings. He indicated that only three departments would be presenting at this meeting because the High School had requested that their presentation be delayed until January 24<sup>th</sup>.

**Department Presentations**

**Library/Media Services**

Department Head: Nancy Rose

Committee Liaisons: R. Barnes, B. Cummings and R. Swonger

Liaison Report: R. Barnes reported that the library budget was pretty straight forward. He indicated that all software licensing has been consolidated into one line in the budget so that line may look like an increase, but it not. He noted that the District is proposing purchasing 10 mimeo interactive systems, which are portable interactive whiteboard systems and that the line for book binding had been zeroed out, which he said was disappointing since rebinding extends the life of a book. R. Swonger stated that the theme of the department is technology. He said that the department has a long term technology plan to build the capability and level of technology throughout the District and is trying to balance needs and available funds. He said that much of the District's computer equipment is past industry life expectancy. For example, PCs average 13 years before they are replaced. He indicated that the department is looking long term at equipment needs as well as cost to maintain current equipment versus cost to replace. He also said that E-books are not cost effective for the District at this time. B. Cummings said the department is working toward providing a consistent student experience throughout all grades.

He indicated that staff now use electronic or on-line maps, and that donated computers are helping the District get newer equipment at no cost. He said he thought this was a fair and responsible budget.

Department Head Comments: N. Rose said she had no additional comments to make.

Discussion included the following:

- Book binding
  - The cost to rebind a book is \$12.50.
  - The cost to replace varies by title.
  - The Department will re-bind a book if it costs more to replace a title. M. Shevenell indicated that money for re-binding could be taken from a department maintenance line.
  - The Department Head hopes this is a one-time cut. Books in bad shape are removed from circulation
- Mimeo interactive systems
  - Mimeo system is a portable bar that is attached to a white board. That bar is the most important part of the system. System works with a computer and a touchpad.
  - Ideally, the Department wants a mimeo system in each classroom. (300 rooms total)
  - Lessons can be developed offline using the software.
  - There is heavy demand for and rave reviews about the mimeo systems currently available in the District.
- TV/Projectors
  - The District hopes to replace TV presentation systems with ceiling mounted projectors.
  - These projectors will be used in combination with the mimeo interactive system.
  - The plan is to purchase 40 projectors a year, over the next 5 years.
  - There are currently 100 data projectors in District.
- Software licensing
  - Consolidating all the software licensing resulted in a \$5,000 volume discount.
  - The software used by the District offices is under a District-wide license.
  - The Department Head felt that there would be significant professional development costs to change to another operating system because most of the educational software used by the District was developed for Microsoft operating systems.
- Technology plan
  - The technology plan calls for \$82,000 per year to replace equipment; however, the proposed budget does not include that much.
  - The Department Head said that the need for a zero budget meant putting off some replacements and that she did not know whether additional amounts would be added to the budget in the coming years or whether the plan will be extended out for a year.
- Periodical budget
  - This budget purchases magazines, newspapers and other recurring materials that support the curriculum and professional development

- In addition, some popular magazines are purchased to encourage reading.
- The District uses a service company to dispose of electronic equipment that is in use. There is sometimes a minimal cost.
- The District has one Network Administrator who works with vendor and server support, District computer technicians and staff to maintain the District's network.

### **Special Services**

Department Head: David St. Jean

Committee Liaisons: J. Burk, G. Krupp and R. Swonger

Liaison Report: J. Burk reported that the Special Services budget highly regulated by Federal and state laws and is driven by specific individual students and their "Individual Education Plans" (IEP). She said the department has serviced a relatively stable number of students in the last few years and that the percentage (16.4%) of students served is in line with state average (15.4%): a little under 700 students. She said that most students receive services "in district," though 43 students have an "out of district placement" (ODP). She said the increases in the proposed budget are related to services needed per IEP and increased transportation costs. She indicated that the Department gets revenue from State and Federal funding, Catastrophic Aid, and Medicaid reimbursement. G. Krupp reported that 30% of the Department's budget is reimbursed by revenue and that the increase in cost for para-professionals at the high school was due in part to off-site visits. He indicated that no para-professional positions were cut at the middle school because the cluster that was eliminated did not have any para-professionals assigned to it. He also noted an 80% increase in the number of autistic students over the last seven years. R. Swonger said that the liaison team spent a lot of time discussing the Special Education process, what is mandated and who pays. He indicated that the trend in Merrimack is to try to create a program that will provide needed services in-district rather than pay for an ODP.

Department Head Comments: D. St. Jean had no additional comments to make.

Discussion included:

- State/Federal reimbursement
  - The Federal government pays the District \$1,200 per student with an IEP.
  - Catastrophic aid from the State reimburses the District for IEP costs for any student over \$44,000, the year after the expenditure is made.
  - Medicaid reimbursement covers 50% for services such as speech, occupational or physical therapies.
  - State aid came in at 77.237% of what was expected last year. Prior years the District has received 100%.
  - Adequacy revenue in the proposed budget assumes the District will receive the amounts currently legislated.
- Auditory Systems
  - The District received \$850,000 in Federal stimulus funds.
  - The funds were used to purchase several auditory systems which have been very successfully used.

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- The Department would like to purchase more systems when, and as, able.
- The budget line from which these systems were purchased was cut \$10,000 in the proposed budget.
- The Department head feels that, long term, the funds will need to be restored to the budget line, but that the Department will be able to manage next year.
- Site visits
  - Federal law requires services for disabled children until they receive a high school diploma or turn 21.
  - Part of the requirements for disabled students, when they reach high school, is a transitional plan toward employment.
  - Several employers in town offer site visit opportunities for students with IEPs to learn a job.
  - Each student is transported to the site and accompanied by a para-professional.
  - The District is 100% in compliance with the requirement.
- Para-professionals.:
  - The number of para-professionals listed in the proposed budget is a “full-time equivalency,” though most of the para-professionals are full timers.
  - Para-professionals are considered full-time if they work 32.5 hours a week.
  - Full-time para professionals receive benefits.
  - There could be contractual issues if a full-time position was changed to become two or more part-time positions.
  - Benefits to having full-time para-professionals include consistency for the student, and increased dedication and availability within the District.
  - There are several training opportunities, national as well as in-district, for the para-professionals.
  - Para-professionals can get a pay increase for taking additional training.
  - Each para-professional is assigned to, and supervised by, a licensed special education teacher.
  - The para-professional contract is currently under negotiation. If approved by the School Board, the new contract will be a warrant article, which will include any salary cost adjustments necessary.
- Having two interns, who work under certified professionals and who help with the referral and evaluation process has helped save money for the District.
- The number of students with ODPs has decreased by three, which has resulted in a \$160,000 reduction in this budget line.
- Transportation
  - Transportation costs throughout the budget show a 10% increase.
  - The transportation contract is currently being bid.
  - Bids are due by January 27<sup>th</sup>, after which the District will know true transportation costs.
- There is one Special Education Coordinator per building. The salary for each shows up as a teacher’s salary, but their jobs include administrative functions.

### **Elementary Schools**

Principal and Assistant Principal: MES – John Fabrizio and Emily Carter,  
TFS – Bridey Bellamare and Sharon Putney  
RFS – Nick Coler (Assistant Principal)

Committee Liaisons: R. Barnes, R. Buckley and C. Guagliumi

Liaison Report: R. Buckley reported that the proposed Elementary School Budget was almost a carbon copy of the prior year's budget and was flat. He acknowledged the condition of the carpet in the library and variances in condition of classroom desks. C. Guagliumi noted safety concerns regarding the tables in the cafeterias. She said that the new equipment and school furniture result in a safer environment. She said that the cost for field trips is for transportation only. R. Barnes noted that the new desks can be adjusted for height and that there are no longer any parts available to fix the cafeteria tables. Currently when something breaks, a replacement part has to be "manufactured" to fix the tables.

Department Head Comments: B. Bellamare, as spokesperson for the elementary schools, said that RFS Principal. K. Yarlott, had been unable to attend and that she had no additional comments to make.

Discussion included:

- The reduction in the TFS furniture budget was because a conference table was donated to the school.
- Field trips (costs and destinations) are consistent across all elementary schools.
- Everything went smoothly with the roof replacement at RFS.
- New security entrances were installed at both TFS and RFS.
- RFS has a nature trail that has worked out well. There is a District level committee working on such a trail at TFS.

### **Other**

A. Schneider reminded liaison leads to schedule meetings with the other departments before the Committee's next meeting.

G. Krupp stated, for the record, that he had the proposed budget on his I-Pod and was using it, instead of a budget book, during the meeting.

### **Public Participation II**

There was none.

S. Heinrich made a MOTION to adjourn. Second: R. Buckley. MOTION PASSED unanimously.

A. Schneider adjourned the meeting at 8:28 PM.