

Merrimack School District Budget Committee

Minutes January 29, 2015

Present: R. Barnes, K. Bobbitt, B. Cummings, J. Hanson, S. Heinrich, D. Illg, C. Mower, C. Lang, L. Mooney, C. Skarda and School Board liaison C. Guagliumi

Excused: S. Jacoby

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

S. Heinrich called the meeting to order at 7:05 P.M. and led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance. S. Heinrich explained that the meeting of January 27th was cancelled due to snow and this meeting was being held on the posted snow date.

Approval of Prior Minutes

C. Lang made a MOTION to approve the minutes of January 13, 2015 with corrections. Second: K. Bobbitt. C. Lang proposed several corrections. MOTION PASSED: 9 – 0 – 2. (L. Mooney and C. Skarda abstaining.)

Department Budget Reviews:

Food Service

Department Head: David Dziki

Committee Liaisons: C. Lang, S. Heinrich, L. Mooney, J. Hanson

Liaison Report: C. Lang told the Committee that the Food Service budget is revenue neutral and has no impact on the bottom line of the School District budget. She said it receives its funding from the Federal government and from students purchasing lunches. She indicated that the only significant item in the budget is the purchase of a steam table for the cafeteria at the upper elementary school.

D. Dziki told the Committee that the challenge the department faces is following the 2010 Federal re-authorization regulations while balancing the likes and dislikes of the students. He said some of the regulations involve using 100% whole grains, sodium reduction, calorie requirements and smart snacks. He said the department had replaced one steam table at the upper elementary school last year and is requesting funds to replace the other steam table, which is 19 years old. He said this steam table moves from the kitchen to the serving area and its purpose is to keep food at a constant temperature. He mentioned the department is now working with two different companies for its computer program needs; one for software and one for hardware but things are working well

Discussion included the following:

- Some students do not like the 100% whole grain bagels and have started a petition to send to the Federal government hoping to change some of the 2015 re-authorization regulations.
- The current steam table could be sold for scrap metal.

Special Services

Department Head: John Fabrizio

Committee Liaisons: L. Mooney, K. Bobbitt, D. Illg

J. Fabrizio told the Committee that the Special Services budget is based on state and Federal laws that the District must follow. He said two major concepts are the “least restrictive environment” and “free and appropriate education.” He said the District must educate students with disabilities in conformity with their individual education plans, with peers without disabilities by bringing in specialists to try to meet the needs of these students, in District. He said the District only sends students out of District if an appropriate accommodation cannot be made in District. He said his proposed budget is up 2.1% and that is because of a 3% increase in the transportation budget. He indicated that if a student’s plan calls for education at a charter school, then per Public Law 194, the district must provide a para-educator as well as provide transportation to the charter school for the student. He also said that the costs of out of district placements are regulated by the state; however, next year he expects only 40 out-of-district placements instead of the current 43 out of district placements. He also said that the District is working toward using I-Pads and other more automated assessment tools.

Liaison Report: L. Mooney told the Committee that the liaison team had discussed adding a psychologist for more district-wide mental health services. However, the department budget as proposed has sufficient services budgeted for all evaluations needed next year.

Discussion included the following:

- The District pools costs for services, with other school districts, where appropriate.
- Administration feels that a district-wide psychologist should be added to a future budget, but that the proposed budget has sufficient resources to meet the current need.
- Various school administrators indicated to Committee liaison teams that they are dealing with increased numbers of student mental health issues.
- If there was an emergent need for a mental health professional, the District could hire someone using the Special Services Capital Trust Fund.

Mastricola Upper Elementary School

Principal and Assistant Principal: Marcia McGill and William Morris

Committee Liaisons: R. Barnes, C. Guagliumi, K. Bobbitt, D. Illg

Liaison Report: R. Barnes said the proposed budget was pretty straightforward. He said the replacement furniture requested includes new tables for classrooms and for the cafeteria. He indicated the team had toured the school and saw the benefits of “kidney” shaped classroom tables. C. Guagliumi said one of the reasons she likes the Committee liaison process is the ability to see items that are part of the budget.

Principal McGill told the Committee that the proposed budget supports purchasing additional materials and resources, especially in the curriculum areas of reading, writing and math.

Discussion included the following:

- The new secured entrance is working very well.

Library/Media Services

Department Head: Nancy Rose

Committee Liaisons: C. Skarda, B. Cummings, J. Hanson

N. Rose told the Committee that there is only one computer technician for the entire District and that she feels, due to the amount and complexity of the technology that the District needs and uses, another technician who would focus on the elementary levels is needed so that technology educators at the elementary schools can focus on teaching. She also said that, while her department supports the District technology needs, the department budget also supports the District's school libraries. She said the District is the only District in the state with a centrally managed library collection and that the libraries provide non-fiction materials to support the curriculum and fiction items to promote reading.

Liaison Report: C. Skarda told the Committee that the proposed Department budget supports the 3rd year of the District's technology plan, which is part of the District's Capital Improvement Plan. He indicated that the budget also includes on-going software licensing and other consumable costs. He said the District adds memory to older computers where it can, but is experiencing difficulty working with some of its older equipment.

Discussion included the following:

- The District is still working toward becoming 100% wireless. Currently, 80% of the District has wireless access.

Maintenance

Department Head: Tom Tousseau, Business Administrator M. Shevenell & Matt

Committee Liaisons: C. Lang, S. Jacoby, S. Heinrich

Liaison Report: C. Lang said that Administration cut over \$400,000 from the department's originally requested budget and the School Board cut more. She said the liaison team reviewed the cut items as well as the budget as currently proposed. She indicated that the high school windows are currently secure but will need to be replaced shortly. She said complete replacement of some sections of the sidewalk at the middle school would be needed in the future. She said she felt the plow truck that the department wants to replace is at the end of its useful life. She said the School Board added funds to the budget for patchwork on the track because it wants to defer replacing the track at this time. She told the Committee the team had asked M. Tousseau about the goal posts and the Masticola Elementary shelving that were discussed at the Committee's last meeting and learned that replacing goal posts is beyond the scope of student work, but that potentially wood shop students could make the shelves if Masticola Elementary staff want additional shelving. S. Heinrich told the Committee that the Maintenance staff is at maximum workload. He said the original budget had asked for an additional full-time custodian, which was cut by Administration. He said the liaison team had talked about a Committee field trip to see district-wide maintenance concerns next year. He also said replacing the sidewalk at the middle school will be a major job since it needs to be totally replaced.

T. Tousseau said there is a real need for the plow truck. M. Shevenell said that when the middle school opened, no additional maintenance staff was added, even though there was another

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building and acres of fields that needed to be maintained. He said that now that the school is ten years old, it is harder to maintain and additional staff will be needed.

Discussion included the following:

- A part-time custodian might be beneficial and would incur less benefit costs.
- The department uses technology for help manage and monitor facilities: heat regulation, turning on/off fans and blowers, keeping records of after school events, day-to-day maintenance issues, equipment and supply inventory and ordering, etc.

District Wide

Superintendent M. Chiafery, Assistant Superintendent Dr. M. McLaughlin, School Business Administrator M. Shevenell

Committee Liaisons: S. Heinrich, L. Mooney, J. Hansen, C. Lang

Liaison Report: S. Heinrich told the Committee that the District employs over 500 people. He said the guaranteed maximum health insurance increase is no more than 4.4%. He also said the retirement contribution is going up 10% but the total amount of \$450,000 is less than what was paid last year. He said that a variety of things had been cut from the District-Wide budget, but Administration indicated the School Board left money in the budget for items they felt were important. J. Hanson said a new item in the budget is a bus to transport Merrimack students to a charter school that is located in Merrimack. He said by law, towns that provide transportation to public schools in their town must provide transportation for students to attend private schools in their town. He said this year's cost was \$35,000 and 11 Merrimack students attend the school. C. Lang told the Committee about "CopSync 911" which is a statewide emergency management system to promote faster emergency response times.

Superintendent Chiafery told the Committee that a team of 19 people put together the Administration's original proposed budget. She said that some tough decisions had been made regarding new staffing requests. She indicated that the District has a vision to expand the pre-school to Thorntons Ferry; the Library/Media program needs a computer technician; the Maintenance department needs additional staff; and at some point in the future, the District is going to need a staff mental health professional on staff. M. Shevenell told the Committee that the budget was built "from the ground up." He also noted the district is now using a different vendor for the parent information/technology program. C. Guagliumi, School Board liaison to the Committee, told the Committee that while the District has an approved Technology Plan, the plan does not include staffing resources to manage the plan. In addition, she said that CopSync911 was important for the safety of students and staff.

Discussion included the following:

- The District's proposed sidewalk project did not meet the criteria for a Safe Routes to Schools grant. It might be a good idea to expand the project and revisit the issue.
- Retirement costs are increasing, but hopefully the NH Retirement System now has a workable plan in place, which will stabilize the need for future increases.
- Several Committee members suggested it might be better to address student mental health needs now.

The Committee took a brief recess at 8:58 PM.

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The meeting resumed at 9:12 PM and discussion continued.

- There was no interest in a high deductible health insurance plan.
- The Kinder-Morgan gas line proposal does not seem to affect any District property.
- The School Board asked Administration to put items that it saw as future needs in the budget.
- The District has a Committee of 18 people who meet monthly to discuss ways to contain health care costs. It has been in existence for 10 years.
- Currently the tax rate is .034¢ per \$100,000 or 34¢ per \$1,000,000.

Upcoming Meetings

S. Heinrich reminded the Committee that the next meeting would be February 3rd. He said the meeting would include a presentation of warrant articles and a work session on the proposed budget.

M. Chiafery told the Committee she was presenting seven warrant articles to the School Board on February 2nd and would present those that the School Board approved to the Committee on the 3rd.

S. Heinrich told the Committee that, during the work session, members could make motions to adjust the operating budget. He requested that members making such motions provide a specific account number and dollar amount. He suggested that any member wanting to add or cut a position contact him so that he could get a salary number that included benefits from M. Shevenell. He also said that, while the Committee makes changes to specific budget lines, it is actually only changing the bottom line.

S. Heinrich told the Committee that there were two changes to the Committee meeting schedule.

1. If the Committee needs to use its snow date of February 12th for the meeting and Public Hearing currently scheduled for February 10th, the Committee will be meeting in the Masticola Elementary School APR.
2. The Committee will be meeting after Deliberative Session in the Masticola Upper Elementary School APR on March 4th

Public Participation

There was no public participation

C. Lang and B. Cummings made the MOTION to adjourn. Second: everyone else. MOTION PASSED unanimously.

S. Heinrich adjourned the meeting at 9:30 PM.