

Concord School District Board of Education
Board Work Session #3 – Special Education Services
February 12, 2018

Board members present: Clint Cogswell, *President*, Tom Croteau, Chuck Crush, Jennifer Patterson, Maureen Redmond-Scura, Pam Wicks, Liza Poinier, Jim Richards

Board members absent: Nathan Fennessy

Administration: *Superintendent* Terri L. Forsten, *Assistant Superintendent* Donna Palley, *Business Administrator* Jack Dunn, *Director of Student Services* Robert Belmont

Other Staff: *Out-of-District Coordinator* Marjorie Mead, *Special Education Coordinator* Nancy Pender, *Beaver Meadow School Principal* Michele Vance

Board President Jennifer Patterson called the meeting to order at 5:50 p.m., noting that the Work Session would include discussion of Title I, Title III, and Special Education services within the District and their impact on the budget. Director of Student Services Bob Belmont introduced Marjorie Mead, Nancy Pender and Michele Vance, then reviewed the agenda items for the work session:

- Budget goals for 2018 – 2019
- Overview of Student Services
- Success stories
- Student Services enrollment
- Major expenditures
- Budget summary
- Revenues – Grants
- Future development
- Upcoming budget meetings
- Questions – public comment

Mr. Belmont reviewed the Student Services' budget goals:

- Special Education – support for students ages 3-21
- English Language Learners – approximately 365 ELL students from over 40 different countries
- Title I
- Specialized Services – components of SAMHSA grant

- Future planning and development

Student Services is a partnership between special education and District teaching staff built on a multi-tiered system of support, including academic and behavioral support. Approximately 5-10% of District students may need additional support in either or both of these areas.

Nancy Pender shared two student success stories, beginning in the preschool program and transitioning through elementary school. She discussed these students' emotional and social development and improvement with the help of in-class individual and group support.

Marjorie Mead shared her early teaching experience and motivation for pursuing a career in special education, as well as anecdotal stories of previous students and their postsecondary success. She noted that it takes a team of dedicated educators to help these students achieve success.

Michele Vance, Beaver Meadow School (BMS) Principal, reviewed BMS' journey from a focused Title I school to a National Distinguished Title I School. She noted the school's focus on three goals:

- Improve student's achievement levels in reading, math, and writing
- Increase opportunities for family engagement, support and involvement
- Improve school climate and culture

She added that educators' work at BMS is driven by continuously answering these four essential questions:

- What do we expect students to learn? (Goals/Expectations)
- How will we know they are learning? (Assessments)
- How will we respond when they don't learn? (MTSS/RTI)
- How will we respond if they already know it? (Enrichment)

She then focused on strategies to improve school climate and culture:

- Leadership Team
 - Assessed climate needs
 - Developed a shared vision and mission statement
 - Shared experiences from the PLC Summit
- Universal Team (PBIS)
 - Analyzed how behavioral data was being utilized at each tier in MTSS
 - Streamlined each tier using data to identify Tier 2 & Tier 3 needs
 - Created universal lessons and roll out for school year
- Tier 2 Team
 - Analyzed individual student data
 - Implemented schedules of interventions at each grade level

She shared data that reflected a significant improvement in behavioral issues over the past three school years.

Ms. Vance reviewed the many programs at BMS that increased opportunities for family engagement, support, and involvement:

- Hosted Math and Literacy Nights
- Family Resource Center – 24 families attend regularly
- Ready for Kindergarten
- PTO events – zero-cost events that include meals
- Parents on Leadership & Universal Teams
- Weekend Wagon Program
- Student Actor Program

She reviewed educator strategies to improve students' achievement levels in reading, math, and writing:

- Create "Professional Learning Community"
- Share ownership of student's social, emotional, and academic growth
- Use data to drive instructional decisions and create schedules to support school
- Foster a learning environment where everyone has a "growth" mindset
- Allow time for teams to review both formative and summative data, such as Grade-level PLCs and Data Days
- Celebrate growth and create SMART Goals to guide work

Pam Wicks complimented and commended both students and staff in the Student Actors Program.

Mr. Belmont reviewed Student Services enrollment patterns for elementary, middle, and high school for the past five years. He noted that numbers have seemed to even off at all levels, representing approximately 15% of the overall student population, or 763 students ages 3-21, K-12+.

Chuck Crush asked about the guidelines for determining if a student has special needs, and if those criteria were in line with the rest of the state. Mr. Belmont responded that the District was in line with New Hampshire state guidelines and that staff were trained on disability classification and guidelines to accurately identify these students.

Tom Croteau noted that the success stories shared were heartwarming and asked for the District success rate. Mr. Belmont noted that 35 students last year had made enough progress to return to general education; this year, 10 students so far. He noted that standardized tests provide insight into how these students are progressing and achieving success. Mr. Croteau asked if Mr. Belmont could provide a report to reflect the percentage of students meeting and achieving Special Ed goals per year. Ms. Palley added that this data is kept per student and not aggregated, but that this data could possibly be aggregated.

Mr. Crush suggested that the District should compile data and metrics to track the success of these programs. Superintendent Forsten explained that this data has not been tracked collectively but that this could be discussed.

Jim Richards asked for clarification on enrollment numbers; Ms. Palley explained that preschool students are not reflected on the graph. Mr. Richards and Mr. Crush asked for

an updated slide to highlight preschool students, students ages 19-21, and out-of-district/charter/Second Start students, to more accurately analyze student data.

Mr. Belmont reviewed the English Language Learner population, noting that over 40 languages are spoken among CSD students and 365 students are currently eligible for ELL services, reflecting 8% of the student population. He noted that the immigrant/refugee population has declined from 100 enrolled last school year to 10 this school year.

Ms. Palley reviewed major expenditures:

Twenty-two students are projected to be placed out-of-district for the coming school year; this represents just over 3% of students with educational disabilities. The expenditures noted include tuition, related services and transportation.

Highlights

- Twenty-two students placed out-of-district:
 - 11 students placed by the District
 - 10 students placed by the court
 - 1 student parentally placed
 - 1 student in foster care
- Five elementary school; two middle school; and 15 high school students
- Four students have returned to the District recently from out-of-district placements, which accounts for the projected lower costs for the coming year in this area. There are some increased related costs to the budget in other areas, for example, an increase in behavior specialists and other related services to support students' placement in Concord schools. There will be related savings in transportation costs as students return to their home districts.

Ms. Palley noted that these 22 students are on very individualized plans and their costs vary from \$45,000-\$200,000 or more, depending on their placement and needs. Mr. Cogswell asked about the five elementary students; Ms. Palley clarified that several are in foster homes and several are students with very significant needs. She noted anecdotally that Concord's out-of-district placement percentage is quite low for a District of this size compared to other districts in the state.

Ms. Palley reviewed educational assistant numbers by location. Mr. Richards asked why the District added eight educational assistants even though the number of students decreased. Ms. Palley explained that while the student numbers have decreased, the degree of severity in the needs of students is increasing.

Ms. Wicks noted that the District's current program to assist severely disabled students begins in grade 3 and asked if the District is considering similar programming for kindergarten through grade 2 students. Ms. Palley responded that there is currently self-contained/in-classroom support available for these students, rather than an out-of-classroom program, noting there are approximate 8-12 students in this program. Ms. Wicks said that she hoped the District could perhaps pursue more early intervention with these students to help ease the burden as they get older.

Ms. Palley reviewed funds requested from the General Fund, which were previously supported by the SAMHSA grant, in the amount of \$159,941. She reviewed the four areas on which the District would like to focus these funds: early childhood and family centers, family engagement, substance abuse prevention, and mental health. She noted that the substance abuse prevention program staff work with students, families and staff. She addressed Riverbend Health and the clinicians located inside six of the schools who work with students individually, in groups, and with families.

Mr. Richards asked if the Board commits to these funds, and as the SAMHSA grant monies run out, the future amount needed to cover these programs could increase significantly. Ms. Palley responded that these are large federal grants which are at minimal risk of discontinuation. She also noted that Community Bridges has pledged to match funds for the mental health piece of this programming. Mr. Cogswell expressed his support of these programs as early intervention is so important to help these students achieve success. Ms. Palley noted that the District provides substantial professional education to early childhood care providers in the area. Mr. Richards asked where these centers are located, and Ms. Palley responded that there are centers located at MBS, the new community center on Concord Heights, BMS, Jennings Drive near the Housing Authority, and either at CMS or ADS.

Ms. Palley then reviewed Bill White contracted services provided to the District, which have been part of the District for 25-30 years and provide support for special needs students, including autism and other behavioral needs. She added that these staff are attached one-to-one with students with very significant needs that District staff cannot provide within their own classrooms. Ms. Redmond-Scura asked for an explanation of the increase between last year and this year. Ms. Palley responded that this was for 2-3 additional behavioral specialists. Mr. Crush asked how the District decides on service providers, i.e. if an RFP is sent around, and what percentage of the special education budget is for these contracted services. Ms. Palley responded that she is not aware of any other groups that offer the services that Bill White's group provides. She added that other Districts also use his services.

Superintendent Forsten added that the administration regularly and frequently reviews the small number of students with particularly severe needs, to assess whether these services are making a positive difference. Mr. Richards noted that this was a particularly high increase and that questions about its efficacy are valid. Mr. Cogswell commented that these reviews of individual student cases are better assessments of program success than the budget numbers themselves. He added that general enrollment has been going down, while these high-need student numbers have been increasing.

Mr. Belmont expressed that without the Bill White services, the 11 students with the most profound needs would more than likely be out-of-district placements. He added that it would be helpful for the Board to review the student cases involving 1:1 educational assistants to review the work being done. Ms. Wicks observed that the increase does seem to be with severe behavioral needs rather than conditions like autism or cerebral palsy.

Mr. Croteau asked if Ms. Palley could describe the job of the 11 behaviorists contracted by the District. Ms. Palley explained that these professionals work in close conjunction with teachers and educational assistants with the highest-need students, to provide both academic and behavioral support. She added that each school has one person onsite who handles crisis behavioral management, noting that the elementary schools do not have assistant principals. She continued that these contracted staff are meant to provide onsite assistance with areas and times of particular behavioral needs, in a preventive capacity, as well as to work closely with teachers, principals, and special education staff. Mr. Croteau asked who these in-school staff members are, and Ms. Palley responded that she could email that information to the Board. Mr. Croteau asked whether the elementary behavioral specialist and autism specialist noted in the budget are separate positions, and Ms. Palley confirmed that they are. Ms. Patterson asked the administration to provide more in-depth information regarding Bill White consultation services given the two new Board members and more questions currently, adding that the Board could add extra time to discuss this at a future meeting.

Ms. Palley reviewed budget numbers associated with contracted services and out-of-district costs. She also noted some salary increases, explaining that these are associated with school nurses and counselors. Mr. Richards asked for clarification regarding a discrepancy in the budget number in this presentation versus the original budget presentation at the first work session, and Mr. Dunn responded that he would provide Mr. Richards with that information.

Mr. Belmont reviewed state and federal sources of funding, including Title I, Title III, and various grants, explaining that parent involvement and family engagement activities have been a critical part of these student support services. He also noted success in that Medicaid was funding a significant and increased portion of students with IEP services, and the District's involvement with a project known as iSocial at the preschool level, which provides support for students' social-emotional needs, with Concord being seen as a leader. He also discussed Special Education Aid, which helps pay for high-cost students in or out of District. Mr. Belmont added that funds from this grant have helped the District provide "calming corners" at each of the preschool programs, which provide safe, calming spaces and materials for students with sensory needs.

Mr. Croteau asked if special education money is reimbursed based on actual spending or if it goes down each year, explaining that he was wondering if the state was doing its due diligence in supporting these needs. Mr. Belmont responded reimbursement for special education is based on the funds available as determined by the legislature and that there is an amount the District is expected to pay first, after which a claim can be submitted to cover additional need. He added that typically only 68-69% of this additional requested funding tends to be approved.

Mr. Belmont discussed future directions. Superintendent Forsten noted that the administration constantly reviewed current and projected future needs, adding an increased need for special education staff, particularly at the management level, at the elementary schools, as success has been shown at the middle and high school with these staff members in place. She emphasized the critical need for Bill White's services as these

staff provide necessary support services for students with the most complex needs that the District is otherwise unable to provide with regular teaching staff. She emphasized that staff does everything they can to support these students as well as the general student population, and that the District only moves ahead with requests for additional educational support staff after critical review and a conclusion that it is absolutely needed.

She added that the administration and Board need to come together to review and support these programs. Ms. Redmond-Scura asked whether specialized nursing staff are included in this piece of the budget, and Superintendent Forsten responded that they are. Ms. Patterson asked Superintendent Forsten her thoughts on when the Board might hear more about this piece of the budget, as there had been many questions. Superintendent Forsten responded that she recommended moving forward with currently-scheduled meetings, possibly combining two topics into one meeting to save time. Mr. Dunn recommended the Board do whatever it needs to feel comfortable posting the budget on February 21. Ms. Patterson asked if it would be possible to get answers to the questions raised at next Monday's meeting on capital facilities and technology, without engaging in an additional lengthy discussion. Superintendent Forsten stated that the administration could provide these answers at the beginning of the meeting scheduled for March 19.

The Board voted unanimously to adjourn at 7:48 pm (motioned by Mr. Richards, seconded by Ms. Poinier).

The meeting adjourned at 7:48 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Maureen Redmond-Scura, *Secretary*