

Concord School District  
Board of Education  
**Board Work Session – Special Education Services**  
**February 15, 2017**

**Board members present:** Clint Cogswell, *President*, Tom Croteau, Nathan Fennessy, Alana Kimball, Jennifer Patterson, Maureen Redmond-Scura, Jim Richards, Pam Wicks

**Board member absent:** Barb Higgins

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

Board President Clint Cogswell called the meeting to order at 5:39 p.m., noting that it was a Board Work Session to discuss Title I, Title III, and Special Education services within the District and the budget impacts thereof. He then turned the presentation over to Director of Student Services Bob Belmont, who clarified that Title III addresses the needs of ELL students, who make up a large segment of the District student population.

(Slides 3, 4) Mr. Belmont reviewed the purpose, staff and student participation numbers, and of Title I grant programs. He noted that principals supervise the Title I services at each school.

Nathan Fennessy asked for clarification regarding the “school-wide” program at Mill Brook School (MBS) mentioned by Mr. Belmont, who clarified that MBS currently is able to use Title I funds to support all students throughout the school, rather than a specialized group. He noted that the District is also seeking school-wide participation status for Beaver Meadow (BMS) and Broken Ground Schools (BGS).

(Slides 5, 6) Mr. Belmont reviewed the purpose, staff, and student participation of Title III grant programs. He noted that over 44 languages are spoken in the District, and that from July 1 to present, 52 new refugee/immigrant students were enrolled, with particularly high populations from Nepal, Rwanda, and Tanzania.

Maureen Redmond-Scura asked for clarification regarding student participation numbers as they relate to students testing out of the program via ACCESS testing.

Jennifer Patterson asked if Concord High School (CHS) students are able to move into the general education curriculum if they choose, and Mr. Belmont clarified that yes, the District is still able to provide assistance to these students so they are completely integrated into the general student population.

(Slides 7, 8) Mr. Belmont reviewed IDEA, a federal program that provides students with disabilities with free appropriate public education (FAPE). He reviewed the

participation numbers at each school, including students, teachers, coordinators, psychologists, occupational therapists, LPNs, and SLPs. Mr. Belmont explained that each school's principal currently serves as overseer for special education programs, with shared coordinators and other staff.

Mr. Cogswell asked for clarification regarding whether special education teachers should be considered these students' primary educators; Mr. Belmont clarified that general education teachers are considered these students' primary educators as these students are students first, and students with disabilities, second. Mr. Cogswell asked to see participation numbers at a future meeting, and Mr. Belmont agreed to provide these.

Mr. Fennessy asked for clarification regarding staffing levels at the elementary schools, particularly at BMS. Mr. Belmont clarified that one of the positions, while technically housed at BMS, is actually a district-wide position.

Jim Richards asked for clarification regarding student-teacher distribution. Mr. Belmont and Superintendent Forsten explained that early intervention with K-2<sup>nd</sup> graders is common, and that these students may benefit from these programs in such a way that they may be able to move out of the special education program in later grades.

Tom Croteau asked for clarification regarding the function of school psychologists. Mr. Belmont noted that there are two school psychologists distributed among the five elementary schools, and they frequently conduct risk assessment and eligibility testing. Mr. Belmont clarified that the LPNs currently employed at CHS, Rundlett Middle School (RMS), and BGS each work on a 1:1 basis with one student at each of those schools, and that these cases are regularly assessed for propriety.

Mr. Richards asked for a comparison of the special education staffing level as related to student population. Mr. Belmont clarified that he believes these levels have remained the same, but that he would verify. He then clarified that in New Hampshire, if a parent chooses to enroll their child in a charter school, and if the student is already enrolled in an IEP, that the public school district will provide special education services. He noted that this is unique to this state, and that in other states, the charter schools provide special education services.

Ms. Redmond-Scura asked why special education staff numbers have remained the same while the actual student population has decreased slightly. Mr. Belmont clarified that children with multiple disabilities and/or severe disabilities do need more intensive care, so staffing levels reflect the District's commitment to these students. Donna Palley, Alana Kimball, and Mr. Cogswell shared their anecdotal experiences working in special education, all emphasizing how intense and time-consuming this work is.

Ms. Patterson asked if very high out-of-district costs might be mitigated by increasing in-District special education staff. Mr. Belmont and Superintendent Forsten agreed,

with Mr. Belmont noting that it is the District's ultimate goal to move toward enabling the special education program to bring these students back in-district.

(Slide 10) Mr. Belmont explained the function of Educational Assistants (EA), explaining a projected need for 6.51 EAs based on a proposed full-day kindergarten program.

Ms. Kimball asked for clarification whether this need is reflective of an increased need for students transitioning back in-district. Mr. Belmont explained that yes, this need is fulfilled by the EA staff.

Mr. Cogswell asked for the number of students who receive 1:1 EA services, and Mr. Belmont said that he would verify the exact number, but that the ballpark figure is 40.

Mr. Croteau asked for clarification regarding the 6.51 staff increase figure. Mr. Belmont explained that this number is based on current pre-K enrollment numbers and having a personal knowledge of the intense needs of these particular students. Superintendent Forsten added that this is a firm calculation.

(Slide 11) Mr. Belmont reviewed the proposed budget costs for this school year at just over \$22 million, explaining the lengthy list of services that fall under the purview of special education, including EAs, audiology and visual services, special transportation, health services, and speech and language services, on top of special education teaching services.

Mr. Fennessy asked for clarification regarding the contractor services noted in this services list, and Mr. Belmont explained partnerships with Bill White & Associates Services, New Hampshire Association for the Blind, and other outside contracted services for particularly severe student cases. He further broke down the contracted services through Bill White, which include autism specialist services, behavior specialists, and staff consultant training.

Mr. Croteau asked whether it might be more cost-efficient to utilize Bill White services for the neediest students rather than in-District resources. Superintendent Forsten clarified that some students are intense enough that in-District staff are better equipped than contracted services.

Discussion then centered on recent past budgets and prior conversations regarding ongoing need for contracted services and how to most efficiently integrate these services while best serving students. Mr. Croteau noted that one of the benchmarks for the success of a special education program is a decrease in the number of out-of-district placements. Mr. Belmont responded that an additional benchmark is individual student improvement and engagement in general education and after-school programs.

Mr. Croteau asked for clarification regarding services offered and whether the District is getting the best value for what it is spending. Superintendent Forsten responded that she, Mr. Belmont, and Ms. Palley will review that data.

Pam Wicks asked where there is an advantage of outsourcing these services over hiring in-District special education staff. Superintendent Forsten clarified that this topic is reviewed monthly and is frequently a high-priority topic at team meetings. She continued to note that Bill White & Associates' services focus strongly on autism support services, and that when the District initially engaged their services, this was a huge learning boon for internal staff. She noted that special education student needs have changed notably over the years, particularly in severity, so these services are still extremely valuable and not something easy to hire for. The conversation moved to a general support of outsourcing vs. hiring internal staff as salary-plus-benefits is significantly higher vs. paying a contractor fee, and that there would be additional need for roles like ABAs and support staff to supervise internal staff members.

(Slide 13) Mr. Belmont reviewed out-of-district placements, noting that he would add actual costs to each placement type in response to a request from Mr. Cogswell.

Ms. Redmond-Scura asked if there is a time limit on court-ordered services, to which Mr. Belmont responded that these are complicated and nuanced issues that he addresses almost daily.

Ms. Palley clarified that there is no time limit and these placements will stay in place until appropriate for the child to transition out of the program.

Mr. Fennessy asked for insight into how the opening of the women's prison may impact special education services, to which Ms. Palley responded that she has recently spoken with her contact there and that there is no anticipated impact on the District.

(Slide 14) Mr. Belmont reviewed out-of-district costs and enrollment numbers per school level, noting that the District's actual costs are higher than projected costs.

(Slide 16, 17) Mr. Belmont reviewed entitlement grants (IDEA K-12, IDEA Preschool, Title IA, and Title III), noting that these are federal funds that come through the state. He then reviewed the Medicaid for schools program revenue from FY10 to present.

(Slide 18) Mr. Belmont reviewed the proposed budget 2018 items, consisting of an increase in EAs of 2.57, an increase in special education leadership of 2.5, and an increase in ELL teachers of 1.0.

Ms. Wicks emphasized an observed strong need for a dedicated ELL teacher at MBS as this position provides a safe space and aids in the transition of ELL students. Mr. Croteau asked if the administration has a place in mind for the proposed 2.5 special education leadership positions, to which Mr. Belmont and Superintendent Forsten clarified that these were existing emergent needs carrying over from mid-year hires this current school year.

Superintendent Forsten reviewed the upcoming meeting schedule of February 20 and 22 for Work Sessions, and March 6 and 8 to post the budget and vote. Mr. Dunn clarified that this schedule is contingent on a need to have new contracts out by April 15 and that pushing these meetings out further would alter this current timeline. Ms. Patterson noted that the Board would like additional information on full-day kindergarten that may require a separate Work Session to fully discuss that item. The

Board agreed that the open Work Session currently scheduled for February 22 would be a good time for this.

**The Board voted 8-0 to adjourn (motioned by Mr. Cogswell, seconded by Mr. Croteau).**

The meeting adjourned at 8:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Tom Croteau, *Secretary*