

Concord School District Board of Education
Board Work Session 7 – Public Hearing Feedback & Response
March 14, 2018

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

Board members absent: Nathan Fennessy

Administration: *Superintendent* Terri Forsten, *Assistant Superintendent* Donna Palley, *Business Administrator* Jack Dunn, *Director of Human Resources* Larry Prince, *Director of Facilities* Matt Cashman

Board President Jennifer Patterson called the meeting to order at 5:40 p.m., noting that the Work Session would include a review of the draft budget and discussion of the two public hearings held on March 7 and March 12, including questions from Board members.

Superintendent Terri Forsten reviewed the agenda items:

- Budget 2018–2019 goals
- Full-day kindergarten (FDK) programs
- Class size guidelines and review
- Tax rate
- Outstanding negotiations
- Unreserved fund balance
- Budget summary
- Questions – public comment

Superintendent Forsten reviewed the goals of the budget:

- Regular education
 - Maintain class sizes within the guidelines of Board Policy #41
 - Respond in a responsible manner to changes in student enrollment
 - Include FDK
- Curriculum, instruction, and assessment
 - Continue STEM development
 - Continue software application – Dream Box and Lexia
 - Development for FDK
- Student Services
 - Develop special education leadership to support staff supervision and program development
 - Improve support to students with serious social, emotional and behavioral challenges and autism

- Pick up some components of SAMHSA grant as it sunsets
- Technology
 - Maintain 1:1 devices for all students (with the exception of kindergarten, which is approximately three students per iPad)
 - Continue to replace teacher laptops
 - Replace elementary iPads
- Debt service
 - Maintain 5% of the operating budget for debt service

Superintendent Forsten reviewed current District class size guidelines:

The average class size objectives shall be:

<i>Kindergarten</i>	17	<i>14–17–20</i>
<i>Primary, grades 1 - 3</i>	21	<i>18–21–24</i>
<i>Intermediate, grades 4 - 6</i>	25	<i>22–25–28</i>

If class size exceeds 20 students in kindergarten, 24 students in grades one through three, or 28 in grades four through six, educational consideration will be given to regrouping, employment of an aide or employment of an additional teacher.

She reviewed class size guidelines set by the State of New Hampshire:

Chapter Ed 300 Administration of Minimum Standards in Public Schools

Ed 306.17 Class Size.

(a) Class size for instructional purposes, in each school shall be:

(1) Kindergarten – grade 2, **25** students or fewer per educator, provided that each school shall strive to achieve the class size of 20 students or fewer per educator;

(2) Grades 3 – 5, **30** students or fewer per educator, provided that each school shall strive to achieve the class size of 25 students or fewer per educator;

She also reviewed projected class sizes for the 2018-2019 school year.

Donna Palley reviewed the history of class size ranges since 2012, noting that these ranges have remained steady overall, with occasional exceptions.

Superintendent Forsten reviewed eight years' worth of elementary enrollment and consequent staffing changes:

- History of responding to enrollment changes by adding or reducing staff proportionately
- Enrollment has declined from 2,028 to 1,844 students in eight years - 184 fewer students
- Reduced classroom teacher numbers from 91.5 to 86.0 in eight years - 5.5 fewer classroom teachers

- Projected an elementary enrollment decline from 1,837 to 1,797 for 2018-2019 – 40 fewer students
- Recommended a reduction in teachers in proportion to decline in enrollment – 2.0 fewer teachers

Teacher : Student Ratios

2012	1:19.9
2013	1:19.8
2014	1:20.6
2015	1:20
2016	1:19.8
2017	1:19.8
2018	1:20.2 (proposed)

Superintendent Forsten reviewed class size projections for the 2018-2019 school year, pointing out 8 classes that will be monitored by administration based on their size. Chuck Crush asked for clarification regarding these classes, and whether funds would come from the Superintendent’s contingency fund should the need arise for additional teaching staff. Superintendent Forsten responded that this would be the case. She suggested that a somewhat smaller grade 4 class at Beaver Meadow might warrant reducing the number of sections, which would create two classes of 24 students, within District guidelines. Superintendent Forsten reviewed elementary enrollment projections and the Superintendent’s contingency account, noting an increase to two teaching positions in that account:

Proposed an increase to 2.0 classroom teachers

Class sizes to be monitored

Kindergarten enrollment at ADS, CMS, MBS

Grade 1 enrollment at ADS, CMS, MBS

Grade 5 at ADS, BGS, CMS

Maureen Redmond-Scura asked about a question from the March 12 Public Hearing regarding increased enrollment but a reduction in staff. Superintendent Forsten responded that she was still in discussions with the Principal about this.

Mr. Crush asked when the class size policy was last reviewed. Superintendent Forsten responded that this was revised in 1983; however, it is referenced every year based on each year’s class sizes and projections. Ms. Patterson concurred that there have been serious discussions of class size each year. Ms. Redmond-Scura clarified that K-12 average class size nationally is 22 to 24.

Liza Poinier commented that public opinion seemed to indicate that classes are larger than indicated on the slide. Superintendent Forsten clarified that the slide data was taken from fall enrollment data, and that there might be times when students would choose different exploratory sections, which could lead to class size fluctuation.

Tom Croteau cited an executive summary from the Brookings Institute on the STAR study, which summarized that a class size of 15 produced mixed results – some dramatic improvement, some small improvement, and some with no change. He added that he is in favor of smaller class sizes but that there are many more variables to student success than smaller classes alone.

Pam Wicks commented that today's students' needs are different from when the STAR study was conducted, and that she would be curious to see the results of a more recent study. She added that each class and school has a large array of student needs and abilities, and that the number itself was less important than examining individual classes and student populations.

Ms. Patterson agreed that the Board should look at class size guidelines thoughtfully over the course of the next year via the Instructional Committee, and echoed a need to re-evaluate the intersection of class size and specific needs of classes. She noted that Board members have a responsibility to apply class size guidelines across all the public schools. She added that a study done during the elementary school consolidation project emphasized the importance of smaller class sizes at lower grade levels and the importance of early education.

Jim Richards noted that he heard at the Public Hearings that the addition of FDK teachers was contributing to a reduction in other teacher positions. He clarified that this was not the case, that staff changes remain fairly consistent every year, and rely primarily on enrollment trends which have historically been decreasing.

Ms. Redmond-Scura noted that she had received some feedback from BGS teaching staff who felt that having additional adults in the room is more a hindrance than help.

Clint Cogswell noted his 50 years as a teacher, Principal, and Board member, stating that the District has always responded with resources as needed, if a particular class needed extra help. He added that while class numbers might be slightly higher in a particular school, resources are excellent and distributed according to need. Ms. Patterson commented that Mr. Cogswell's comments referred to the Student Services budget work session discussion and how the Board and administration need to be thoughtful about how resources are provided and distributed.

Ms. Wicks stated that she did not have the impression Ms. Redmond-Scura mentioned regarding additional classroom staff being a burden to some teachers. She added that the unmet need was for average students who might not qualify for Title I services, or are advanced and would benefit from some additional support.

Mr. Richards asked Superintendent Forsten if she was comfortable with 2.0 teachers in the contingency account right now. Superintendent Forsten acknowledged that she was, but was concerned about K-1 enrollments. She added that, given the smaller class sizes and the need in the lower grades, the BMS class could be reduced from three sections to two, which would provide a teacher position without putting next year's BMS grade 4 classes over size guidelines or impacting the budget. Ms. Patterson asked if this potential teacher position would be for kindergarten or the current BMS grade 4 need. Superintendent

Forsten responded that she would like to see later kindergarten enrollment numbers before making that decision. Mr. Richards clarified that the contingency account was not a committed dollar amount but was available if the need arose during the school year.

Jack Dunn reviewed the plan for the stabilization fund:

- Since 2005, the Board has tried to maintain a level capital debt service of 5% of its General Fund operating budget in order to avoid spikes in the tax rate
- Decrease in interest on debt (\$109,951)
- Deposit \$805,322 into the Facilities and Renovation Trust Fund – this would bring that fund to approximately \$4.1 million; funds from the sale of Rumford and Walker Schools, elementary consolidation

Mr. Dunn reviewed the budget's tax impacts, emphasizing that these numbers assume a home's valuation does not increase. He explained that the City uses \$250,000 as an average for home value. He reviewed a draft tax impact worksheet, demonstrating how factors such as a home's assessed value could affect the real dollar tax burden on the taxpayer. He explained that the tax year is from April 1 to March 31, so projects beginning April 1 or later would not affect taxes until the following tax year, and those before March 31 would impact the current tax year.

Ms. Redmond-Scura recalled two comments at the March Public Hearing from people concerned about the FDK plan, and assured viewers that programming would be appropriate for that grade level. Ms. Patterson reiterated that the Board would be able to adjust the stabilization fund should the need arise. Mr. Croteau asked if the administration had a dollar goal in mind for the stabilization fund by the time the RMS project arrived. Mr. Dunn responded that, even with a significant pocket of money earmarked, the project would likely not be possible without impacting the budget. Mr. Dunn replied to Ms. Wicks that there had not been word about the "steam grant."

Mr. Dunn reviewed other considerations and unknowns:

Board

- Negotiations – four collective bargaining groups (Teachers, Educational Assistants, Administrative Assistants and Food Service)
- Catastrophic Aid (special education)
- Adequacy – current year: \$3,636.08 for full-time students, and \$2,918.04 for full-day kindergarteners
- Capital improvements (Rundlett Middle School and other facility improvements)
- Declining enrollment – impact on revenue (\$3,636+ per student as of current year)

City

- Budget development
- Commercial and residential real growth

State

- Legislation – school vouchers re SB 193

Federal

- Medicaid funding
- Entitlement funding
- After-school program funding
- Charter and private school funding

Superintendent Forsten recommended a Negotiations Committee meeting for Wednesday, March 21. Mr. Dunn noted that the Board would vote on the budget on March 19. The budget would require five affirmative votes to pass.

Ms. Poinier stated that public comment was very strongly in favor of keeping class sizes smaller, especially at BGS, and that staff and parents were passionate about not losing those staff members.

Ms. Wicks proposed putting the three teacher positions which were cut into the contingency, and that she was more comfortable with six teachers in the contingency rather than three or four.

Mr. Croteau asked for facts and figures regarding what it would cost for one to five additional teachers in the contingency account and how that would look in the bigger tax rate picture. Mr. Cogswell added that he would like to review budget areas that could be cut to provide these additional staff members.

Ms. Redmond-Scura stated that she would be hesitant to provide additional staff to BGS over other schools simply because its staff members were very vocal at the public hearings, emphasizing that the Board should take input, but very carefully assess this information, to keep all schools on equal footing, as the class sizes at other schools were even higher than at BGS.

Mr. Richards asked that Board members reflect on their roles as Board members, noting that their responsibility was not to micromanage specific staffing, as this was the Superintendent's role. He added that while the Board was responsible for thinking about the contingency account, it would not be appropriate for the Board to attach strings to disbursement of that contingency. Mr. Dunn clarified that each teacher position represented approximately \$93,000 (or roughly \$279,000 for three teachers), meaning the approximate additional tax impact on a \$250,000 home would go from \$78 to \$98. Mr. Cogswell suggested it would be helpful for the Board to see a line-item budget to develop scenarios for moving money around. Mr. Dunn agreed to provide this.

The Board voted unanimously to adjourn at 7:06 pm (motioned by Ms. Redmond-Scura, seconded by Mr. Croteau).

The meeting adjourned at 7:06 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Maureen Redmond-Scura, *Secretary*