

Concord School District Board of Education
Special Board meeting
March 19, 2018

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

Administration: *Superintendent* Terri L. 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 5:34 p.m., noting that the purpose of the Special Board meeting was to review the budget as currently planned, discuss Board member questions, concerns and suggestions, and for the Board to vote whether to pass the proposed budget. Superintendent Terri Forsten reviewed the agenda:

- Budget 2018 – 2019 goals
- Full-day kindergarten (FDK)
- Budget reductions
- Expenditures
- Revenues
- Budget summary
- Other considerations and unknowns
- Questions

Superintendent Forsten emphasized the inclusion of FDK in the budget and her enthusiasm that the Board was able to provide this for Concord families. Business Administrator Jack Dunn briefly reviewed the major funds, expenditures by function and object, revenues, and tax impact, noting that the budget as presented would have a net additional tax impact of \$78 on a home assessed at \$250,000, or a 1.99% increase over FY18.

Superintendent Forsten reviewed those elementary classes that are currently near the high end of the District's class size guidelines, emphasizing that she would be monitoring them closely should additional teaching staff be needed. She noted that the Superintendent's contingency account currently included two teacher positions, and one position each of program assistant, instructional assistant, and tutor.

Mr. Dunn reviewed the Facilities and Stabilization Trust Fund, explaining that every increase of 5 cents per thousand would raise \$180,000 for this fund. He reviewed other considerations and unknowns:

Board

- Negotiations: four collective bargaining groups (*Teachers, Educational Assistants, Administrative Assistants and Food Service*)
- Enrollment – Demographic Study

- Concord High School – road construction on streets (Warren, North Fruit, Woodman, Westbourne)
- Catastrophic Aid (special education)
- Adequacy – current year: \$3,636.08 for full-time students, and \$2,918.04 for FDK
- Capital improvements (Rundlett Middle School and other facility improvements)
- Declining enrollment (this was predicted to be somewhat steady – 1% annually) – impact on revenue (\$3,636 per student as of current year)
- Appropriation for safety and security grant
- Class sizes

City

- Budget
- Commercial and residential real growth

State

- Legislation – vouchers related to SB 193 and others

Federal

- Medicaid funding
- Title I funding
- After school program funding
- Charter and private school funding

Mr. Dunn provided an overall summary of the proposed budget as of March 14, 2018.

Ms. Patterson suggested a motion be made to vote on the budget, followed by consideration of any proposed amendments.

Clint Cogswell noted that he had reviewed the budget line item by line item to find areas where the Board could skim funds in order to add another teacher to the Superintendent’s contingency. He suggested potential reductions in General Supplies (line 661000), noting that a reduction of 5% would provide approximately \$45,000. He also suggested a reduction of 10% from Books (line 664100), which would provide approximately \$24,000, noting that this line has a contingency that allows for emergency book purchases. He asked for an explanation about an increased line item for credit card fees. Mr. Dunn explained that this fee continues to increase as online payment usage increases. Mr. Cogswell asked for a breakdown of an athletic transportation line item, and Mr. Dunn clarified that this was for out-of-district and homeless transportation, not for athletics. Mr. Cogswell asked for clarification regarding a professional services line item, and Mr. Dunn clarified that that was for Second Start services.

Tom Croteau noted that he also reviewed the budget to look for areas of large increase that could possibly be trimmed and reallocated to the Superintendent’s contingency. He noted that custodian overtime had increased by 36%. He asked about a professional services line item, which Mr. Dunn clarified was for William J. White Educational and Behavioral Consulting Services, Inc. contracted special education services. Mr. Croteau asked about a music field trip line item. Mr. Dunn explained that this increase was partially influenced by increasing gas reimbursement/mileage costs, noting that an account on the revenue side

offsets that cost, and that the budget line item was just to account for those funds accurately. Mr. Croteau asked about a family literacy salary line item, which Mr. Dunn explained was to continue programs that had been funded by the SAMHSA grant. Mr. Croteau asked about a staff management and services line item that had increased 44%. Mr. Dunn explained that this was for the auditor from Robert Half who helps manage books, including Food Service. Mr. Croteau asked about a construction services line item, which had increased by 108%. Mr. Dunn explained that this was for the summer projects discussed at a previous work session, including summer painting and updates to the BGS media center; the increase appears substantial as it had been reduced last year.

Jim Richards asked about a line item for “other equipment” that had increased by 17%. Mr. Dunn explained that most of this was for science department equipment. Mr. Richards asked about an increased dues, fees, and interest line item of approximately \$45,000, which Mr. Dunn explained accounted for .5 of a teacher position in the contingency account.

Pam Wicks emphasized that, while she had not reviewed the budget line items, the Board should be less beholden to the numbers and think of any tax increase as an investment in Concord children.

Liza Poinier asked where she could find the line item for student iPads. Mr. Dunn explained that this was in line 644401, in the amount of \$200,000 for a 3-year iPad and Chromebook lease. Ms. Poinier asked about the District’s 1:1 and 3:1 ratios, and stated that she did not believe that many devices may be necessary for kindergarten and 1st grade students. She asked where these ratios came from, and asked how committed the District was to keeping that ratio for 5- to 7-year-olds.

Chuck Crush stated that he was impressed with the amount of public input and feedback during this budget cycle. He stated that he was concerned about class sizes and the consequent burden on teachers with increasingly large groups of very diverse learners, and felt that the Board needed to take a hard look at this issue next year. He added that the Board and administration should be proud of the inclusion of FDK, as this was a big deal for the community; however, it is also the Board’s responsibility to be good stewards of the community and the tax rate. He said he feels passionately that the Board needs to constantly look at and address the needs of students, staff, and paraprofessionals.

Ms. Patterson echoed earlier compliments to the administration on the budget planning process and being able to meet so many needs in a fiscally responsible manner. She said she agreed the Board should review class size guidelines next year in light of increasing numbers of ELL and special needs students, and liked the idea of adding an additional teacher position to the Superintendent’s contingency as she was concerned about elementary class sizes. She noted that it was important to understand the benefit of smaller classes, especially at the K-3 level. She noted that she felt confident that the Board would be able to review and adjust the final budget in October, and that if the Board had the opportunity, it should try to add funds to the Facilities Stabilization Trust account, as the RMS facility need would become critical in the near future. She supported passage of the budget as proposed.

Nathan Fennessy suggested that the Board should defer adding funds to the Facilities Stabilization account until October to see what the real growth rate would be. He supported adding another teacher position to the Superintendent's contingency fund. He noted that, in times of uncertainty, the Board should give the Superintendent the flexibility to address class size issues, and that if a full teacher position could not be added to the contingency, at least a .5 position should be added. He commented that if the District started a new program, it should be done right, and echoed several Board members' support of reviewing class size policies next year.

Mr. Richards stated that while he was not prepared to second-guess class size guidelines at this point, he was concerned about incoming kindergarten class sizes.

Ms. Wicks commented that while eight elementary class sizes were being monitored, the current contingency only contains three teacher positions. She suggested including the three teacher positions cut from the original budget be added to the Superintendent's contingency to allow flexibility for the large elementary classes. She noted that she would rather have this contingency available and not need to use it, in which case the money could be added to the Facilities Stabilization Fund.

Mr. Cogswell stated that he did not support the suggestion to add three teacher positions back into the Superintendent's contingency account, as the Board was responsible to support the entire community by being responsible with the budget, and the proposed budget is responsible. He added that adding one additional teacher position to the Superintendent's contingency fund would be both feasible and responsible.

Superintendent Forsten commented that the administration could review incoming revenues that might offset costs for this additional teacher position, and felt this was doable, without increasing the budget as currently proposed.

The Board voted 9-0 to add one teacher position to the contingency fund (motioned by Mr. Cogswell, seconded by Mr. Richards).

Mr. Fennessy voiced support for this action. Mr. Cogswell clarified that this would be an amendment to the budget, which has not yet been voted on.

Maureen Redmond-Scura asked whether a recent safety grant was accounted for in the budget, and Mr. Dunn stated that it was. Ms. Wicks asked what would happen if the Board did not add back the three teacher positions being cut and elementary enrollment increased dramatically, emphasizing that eight class sizes were being monitored. Ms. Patterson explained that the Board would have until October to make changes to the final budget.

Superintendent Forsten explained that the administration and the Board have reviewed class sizes over the past 10 years, though this year did feel different with FDK coming in as somewhat of an unknown. She added that the Superintendent's contingency traditionally contained 1.5 teacher positions, and this year would have four, a significant increase. She reflected on a situation two years ago when one of the elementary schools experienced an unexpected increase in one particular grade level, so the administration suggested to families that their students could attend a different elementary school, which worked out for several families for various reasons. She reiterated that she was confident that four

teacher positions in the Superintendent's contingency account would suffice, and that she was confident the Board and the administration could handle any unexpected increase.

Ms. Redmond-Scura expressed excitement that FDK was included in the proposed budget, and that even with mixed input from the public, she felt comfortable that the Board had carefully and thoughtfully planned this budget in a responsible way.

Ms. Patterson expressed appreciation for the Early Childhood Education steering committee's work. She was proud that the Board committed so strongly to FDK last year and all the work involved with the implementation – logistics, curriculum, and staffing.

Mr. Fennessy made the motion to pass the budget as proposed with one additional teacher position added to the Superintendent's contingency account.

The Board voted 9-0 to adopt a budget for fiscal year 2018-2019 in the amount of \$87,218,775, with a general fund budget of \$81,791,950 appropriating \$50,131,828 in local taxes and \$7,786,367 in state taxes inclusive of the following program(s), deposits, and withdrawals to existing funds or expendable trust funds:

Program(s)

Full-Day Kindergarten ~\$1,118,312.29

Deposits

Vocational Capital Reserve fund for an amount up to \$151,568

Facilities and Renovation Trust Fund for an amount up to \$805,322

Food Service Fund for an amount up to \$100,000

Renovation and Maintenance Trust Fund for an amount up to \$80,000

and also inclusive of the following WITHDRAWALS from expendable trust funds to fund appropriations:

Vocational Capital Reserve for an amount up to \$110,000;

Risk Management Reserve for an amount up to \$100,000;

Instructional Trust for an amount up to \$25,000

(motioned by Mr. Fennessy, seconded by Chuck Crush).

Mr. Fennessy made a motion to adjourn.

The Board voted unanimously to adjourn at 6:37 p.m. (motioned by Mr. Fennessy, seconded by Mr. Richards).

The meeting adjourned at 6:37 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Maureen Redmond-Scura, *Secretary*