

Concord School District Board of Education

Public Hearing

March 20, 2017

Board members present: *President* Clint Cogswell, Tom Croteau, Barb Higgins
Alana Kimball, Jennifer Patterson, 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 and Planning* Matt Cashman

Board President Clint Cogswell called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m., noting that it was the first public hearing to discuss the FY17-18 budget. He established several ground rules, including limiting speaker time length to ensure participants have adequate time to speak and refraining from applause in between speakers.

Superintendent Forsten briefly reviewed the agenda, which was as follows:

- Budget 2017–2018 Goals
- New program considerations (aka FDK)
- Budget reductions
- Expenditures
- Revenues
- Budget summary
- Other considerations – unknowns
- Questions – public comment

Superintendent Forsten reviewed the five budget goals:

1. Regular education
 - a. Maintain class sizes within the guidelines of School Board Policy #641
 - b. Respond in a responsible manner to the changes in student enrollment
 - c. Include options for developing expanded kindergarten programs
2. Curriculum instruction and assessment
 - a. Continue science and STEM program development with Next Generation Science Standards
 - b. Further develop implementation of college- and career-aligned studies
3. Special education programs and services
 - a. Develop special education leadership to support staff supervision and program development
 - b. Improve programming to support the needs of students with serious social, emotional and behavioral challenges and autism
4. Capital purchases

- a. Use stable, sustainable methods for major purchases, capital improvements and for replacement plans within the budget constraints
5. Debt service
- a. Maintain 5% of the operating budget for debt service
 - b. Attain a bond to complete the conversion from steam to natural gas, CRTC childcare building, and purchase of school buses and technology

She also noted the new program consideration of full-day kindergarten.

Business Administrator Jack Dunn reviewed the budget reductions, noting the particular impact of the Concord Steam conversion and the New Hampshire Retirement System (NHRS) cost increase. He also noted increasing special education costs and NHRS rate.

Mr. Dunn then moved on to review revenue sources for the District, which include local, state and federal funds, with the bulk coming from the state.

FY18 BUDGET: \$23,426,505 (29%)

Local - \$3,966,403	(\$218,907)
• Tuition, Transportation, Building Rental, Athletics, PILOT	
State - \$16,155,653	+365,399
• Catastrophic Aid, Adequacy, Building Aid (grandfathered), Vocational Aid	
Federal - \$1,929,449	(\$395,377)
• Medicaid, E-Rate, Bond Interest Rebates (<i>reduced due to sequestration</i>)	
Transfers - \$90,000	(\$228,901)
• From Grants (<i>Indirect</i>) and Expendable Trust Funds	
Unreserved Fund Balance - \$1,325,000	(\$1,070,975)
• Savings from Prior Year Budget	

Change – (\$1,548,761) or (6.61%)

Mr. Dunn reviewed other consideration and unknown factors that affect budget planning, including union negotiations, the Rundlett Middle School study and subsequent follow-up, and city, state and federal considerations.

Board

- Negotiations - 2017-2018: 5 Collective Bargaining Groups (*Teachers, Instructional Assistants, Maintenance, Transportation and Food Service*)
- Rundlett Middle School Study – to be completed July 2017, then what?
- 2018-2019 Budget - get back to where we are now
- Catastrophic Aid (*special education*)
- Adequacy - *Current Year: \$3,636.08 for full-time students, and \$1,818.04 (1/2 day or full day) for Kindergarteners*
- Capital Improvements (*April 2017 – Review Capital Improvement Plan, Capital Facilities Committee*)

- Declining Enrollment (*predicted to be somewhat steady – 1% annually*) – *Impact on Revenue (\$3,636 per student as of current year)*

City

- Budget (*starting soon*)
- Commercial and Residential Real Growth (*mall valued @ over \$80 million in 2007, now \$18million*)
- Utility Valuation – HB 324

State

- Bi-Annual Budget
- Legislation - State pension cost contributions (HB 413) (HB 415), FDK funding (SB191, HB 155), emergency aid, building aid moratorium, Charter School

Federal

- Medicaid Funding
- Title I Funding
- After School Program Funding
- Charter and Private School Funding

Mr. Cogswell then opened the floor for public comment.

Sarah Robbins is a Concord parent and homeowner, said she understands arguments against full-day kindergarten (FDK), but feels that education is a socioeconomic issue. FDK means parents can have a full day of autonomy and allows children to develop social skills and educational development to keep them on par with their peers. She suggested the community will decide what kind of place Concord is going to be for all families, and FDK is a commitment to that.

Karen Jewell is a longtime Concord resident and certified early childhood educator, and a recently retired kindergarten teacher from Manchester. She said she can personally attest to the success of full-day programs, noted that children adjusted rapidly and that the social and emotional work that goes on in a kindergarten classroom is important for children, as it is a transition between the home/pre-kindergarten and the school setting. She said that kindergarten provides an environment to transition from fear to trust, and teaches children how to care for themselves and others. She said that academics are important but sometimes the aspect of care is forgotten, but is a critical element of education.

Charlie Russell is a Concord homeowner/taxpayer who said he is dismayed at the ever-increasing tax bill. He noted that the Concord Steam conversion and NHRS costs are not under the Board's control, but issues like FDK are. He said he agrees with the benefit of FDK, but feels this is not the year due to the existing, unavoidable costs. He emphasized that seniors and others with fixed incomes struggle with higher tax rates.

Mary Wilke is a retired Concord teacher who emphasized that FDK is beneficial for children to start on an even playing field (half-day K kids vs. FDK kids). She emphasized the importance of socialization at the kindergarten level. She said she does not want teacher cuts, which would increase some class sizes. She said she is on a fixed

income and is willing to pay the tax increase to add kindergarten without cutting teachers.

Susan Lauze has been the Principal at Broken Ground School (BGS) for 14 years and is a Concord resident. She noted that the proposed two-teacher cut would increase the size of ten 4th and 5th grade classes to 26-27 students. BGS has previously had larger class sizes, and keeping class sizes down is critical to ensure teacher-student interaction. She urged that elementary class sizes be placed at the highest priority level.

Ken Georgevitz is a Concord resident whose children graduated from Concord schools. He emphasized the additional city and county tax rate increases, which may increase the tax rate by 10-15% in total. He strongly recommended that FDK be postponed this year due to the enormous tax burden.

Brenda Barth said she feels that FDK should not be treated as a numbers issue vs. a human issue. She said she is worried about teacher cuts, which will negatively impact the community if the education level is not strong and said she was unsure how teacher cuts would benefit Concord children. She said she respects those on fixed income, but feels most are willing to pay for quality education. She emphasized both class sizes and not cutting teachers.

Dwight Keynes is a Concord resident, who said he was grateful for teachers throughout his own life and has a 5-year-old great-grandson he is hoping can attend FDK next year. He noted that 70% of New Hampshire districts have FDK and was surprised that Concord does not.

Rusty Cofrin is a former Concord School Board member and Concord resident whose children are all Concord High School graduates, a retired math teacher and coach. He said he is not in favor of FDK this year, as there are too many other, unavoidable significant, high-cost items in the budget. He noted that, like home budgets, the District cannot spend what it does not have. Mr. Cofrin commented that for the past several years the tax rate has not spiked and has seemed reasonable, but his tax bill spiked last year. He said that he agrees that FDK is a good idea, but he does not want to include it if it involves such a high tax increase. He said that he does not believe state funds would cover FDK, even if the proposal does pass this summer. He commented that if FDK is included in this year's budget, the Board should cut an equal amount from the budget out of fairness to Concord taxpayers, whether or not that includes teachers.

There was a question from the audience (name not given) asking if FDK is implemented whether that would change the configuration of other classes and whether other students would be impacted in a negative way.

Mr. Cogswell noted that this would possibly be the case, and that the Board is looking at this issue.

Sarah Sadowski is a Concord resident who said that she wants to see Concord preserve its reputation for quality education.

Kerri Stone is a Concord resident with two children in the District. She said that she volunteered in her daughter's kindergarten class last year and felt that half-day program did not seem to provide enough time to develop social skills while also completing the educational curriculum. She said that "kids can't be kids" in a half-day program, especially with the Common Core curriculum. She also urged keeping all teachers and said it is okay to pay the higher tax rate.

Roy Schweiker is a lifelong Concord resident who noted that increasing Concord's population is not a benefit, based on previous public comments. He said his own fixed income is decreasing, not even staying level. He said he feels that the costs of technology and the ELL program are also unnecessarily high, and that federal/state funding would help carry the financial burden of the refugee population.

Adam Lesser is a Concord resident who asked the Board not to tie the implementation of FDK programming to staffing cuts.

Christy Bartlett is a Concord resident and New Hampshire Representative whose children went through Concord schools. She said that she agrees with previous comments that FDK is a socioeconomic issue. She noted that the aggregate monthly tax increase is less than a monthly car payment and is a worthy investment in the community.

Betsy McNamara is a Concord resident who emphasized the importance of social and emotional development that takes place in kindergarten, in addition to education. She said that FDK will be important in attracting families with young children to the Concord community.

Karen Hicks is a Concord homeowner and parent. She said many studies show a clear benefit of quality early childhood programming and early intervention for at-risk children (single-parent households, low income) and that New Hampshire is one of eight states without significant public preschool programming. She said she feels there will never be a "convenient time to take the financial plunge," the budget will always have pressing issues and that we just need to do it.

David Parker is a Concord resident and educator. He emphasized that FDK is not the sole issue in this budget discussion. He said he is worried that, over time, the Board will lose support of the community by continuously spiking the tax rate. He acknowledged the support of early childhood education, but worried about the declining community population with increasing tax rates.

Joe Donnelly is a Concord resident with two children in the District. He said he feels that the current half-day kindergarten programming will not support STEM education and Next Generation Science Standards. He also said cutting teachers and increasing class sizes will be detrimental to students.

Margrethe Fjelsted is a Concord resident who was attracted to Concord based on education quality and relatively lower taxes. She said she is worried about the tax rate increase, especially for single-income households. She urged the Board to consider

both quality education and the tax rate and to keep half-day kindergarten programs as an option for families whether or not FDK is implemented.

Kristina Peare is a Concord homeowner and CHS teacher. She said she feels taxes are a privilege in a civilized society and said she is happy to pay higher taxes if it ensures quality education and mitigates the gaps between “haves” and “have-nots.” She said the higher-grade curriculum assumes FDK education for children and that she felt the gap widens with increasing grade levels.

Katie Robert is a Concord resident and parent who moved to Concord specifically because of quality education and its diverse community and who supports FDK.

Jeff Edmonds is a Concord resident and parent. He noted that FDK is not a crisis – rather, the required conversion from Concord Steam is a crisis. He said he feels there is never a good time to expand the budget, but that FDK is the right thing to do as an investment in the community’s children.

David Abrams is a Concord resident with children in Concord schools. He said he represents the “desirable younger demographic” mentioned by previous speakers. He urged the Board to consider why school exists and said he feels the social and emotional benefit of kindergarten cannot be overstated. He said that education prepares children to enter the workforce, and that workplaces are not half-day. He said he is not in favor of teacher cuts.

Nicole Albee is a Concord resident and parent, who said her personal experience is that children strive for the structure and stimulation of all-day school. She said she is not in favor of teacher cuts.

Julie Peterson is a Concord resident and parent. She said she is not in favor of teacher cuts and suggested that implementation of FDK could perhaps wait until next year, with such high taxes this year. She noted the existing extended-day kindergarten program is an option until FDK gets instituted.

Mr. Cogswell thanked the attendees for their participation.

The meeting adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Tom Croteau, *Secretary*