

Concord School District Board of Education
Special Board meeting
March 29, 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 5:32 p.m., noting that this was a special Board meeting to approve a preliminary FY 2017-2018 budget. Board Vice President Jennifer Patterson made several opening remarks, thanking the Board and their administration for their thoughtful and deliberative work during such a challenging budget process. She acknowledged everyone's dedication and hard work.

Superintendent Terri Forsten reviewed the evening's agenda items:

- Review of FY 2018 Budget goals
- Review of options
- FY 2018 Budget appropriations and their tax impact
- Public comment
- Approve the preliminary FY 2017-2018 budget

Superintendent Forsten explained the budget goals the Board had established at the beginning of its budget planning process:

Regular Education

Our focus is to maintain class sizes within the guidelines in the School Board's policy and to respond in a responsible manner to the changes in student enrollment.

- Reduction of 3.0 teachers for the coming year at the elementary level.
- Reduction in 1.6 teaching positions at Concord High School (CHS)
- Increase 1.0 ELL teacher at Mill Brook School (MBS)

Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment

Our goal is to continue our science and STEM program development as Next Generation Science Standards are introduced in our classrooms. Our District committees will focus on further developing implementation of college- and career-aligned studies.

Special Education Programs and Services

Our focus is to develop special education leadership to support staff supervision and program development to support the needs of students with serious social, emotional and behavioral challenges and autism.

- Continue to consider special education leadership development
- Significant impact from out-of-district placements

Technology

Using the projected bond funds, we will continue our purchase of Chromebooks to support 1:1 technology for our high school students. We will also purchase replacement laptops for staff and update our iPads at the elementary schools.

- Complete grades 1 through 12, one-to-one devices
- Adding freshmen and seniors at CHS
- Replace out-of-date devices: iPads at elementary; Chromebooks at RMS

Debt Service

Achieve the Board's goal of maintaining 5% of the operating budget for debt service. Using the \$9 million bond, complete the conversion from steam to natural gas at CHS, Rundlett Middle School (RMS), Abbot-Downing School (ADS) and Christa McAuliffe School (CMS).

Capital Purchases

Continue to use stable, sustainable methods for major purchases and capital improvements and for replacement plans within the constraints of the budget.

- Great financing on the purchases of buses and technology

Business Administrator Jack Dunn highlighted the actual budget numbers vs. last year's estimated numbers (Slide 8), which came in at roughly \$300K under.

Superintendent Forsten briefly reviewed the four full-day kindergarten (FDK) options presented at the budget work session on March 27, noting that the Board had decided to further consider Options 1 and 3. (Slide 15)

Barb Higgins arrived at 5:43 p.m.

Nathan Fennessy asked if, in the Option #3 scenario, the District would have the option to still support students not at Title I-qualified schools who would fall under the tuition category but might not be able to afford it. Superintendent Forsten responded that yes, the Board and administration had discussed scholarship options for these students.

Mr. Dunn explained the projected revenue for tuition (Slide 16) and added that he has spoken with the Transportation Director to determine, based on transportation data, how many students may take advantage of a tuition program.

Mr. Cogswell asked for clarification regarding differentiation of a Title I vs. tuition-based program. Superintendent Forsten explained that students at Title I schools/in Title I-funded programs would need to be separate and not combined with tuition-

paying/non-Title I supported students. Jim Richards asked for a definition of “program” for the purpose of understanding how these curricula would differ. Superintendent Forsten clarified that the curricula and classrooms goals would be the same, or as similar as possible.

Maureen Redmond-Scura asked if the administration has spoken with districts that already have FDK in place to understand how it has worked for them. Assistant Superintendent Donna Palley noted that she had done so, and that implementation varies greatly across districts. Some programs are half academic and half social-emotional, while others treat the afternoon portion of FDK as daycare, with a minimal academic focus.

Tom Croteau emphasized that the Board should remember that any FDK option involving Title I funding will still involve taking approximately \$96K in Title I money away from RMS, which would remove summer programming and extended day and school day programming.

Superintendent Forsten reviewed the challenges to implementing FDK for 2018, including:

- Timing of creating a tuition option
- Timing to communicate options to parents
- Unpredictable revenue sources – tuition, grants
- Impact at this time for local providers
- Predictable impact on our balanced classes
- Impact on Title I at RMS
- Impact on Title I Extended Year (summer) programs
- Unpredictable state adequacy funds or targeted funds for FDK

She emphasized the unpredictability of state and federal funds.

Ms. Higgins asked for clarification regarding teacher cuts that still appear in the draft budget. Mr. Dunn explained that these teachers are not being cut and the budget will update accordingly once it is voted upon tonight.

Mr. Richards asked for clarification regarding class sizes, specifically whether some classes at Beaver Meadow School (BMS) already have 27 students. Superintendent Forsten responded that yes, one 4th grade-going-into-5th grade class does technically have 27 students, but not all 27 are in class full-time, as some are in alternative programs and spend little time in the classroom. She added that staff and administration are carefully keeping an eye on class sizes across the District.

Pam Wicks commented that if the Board does not move forward with FDK this year, it should continue to look at class sizes and be sure to not cut teachers or increase class sizes.

Ms. Patterson asked if there is a way to budget for an additional teacher within the Superintendent's contingency. Superintendent Forsten confirmed that this is possible. She added that elementary class sizes across the District are between 19-21, which is an ideal range and within Board guidelines; very few classes are on the higher end.

Mr. Dunn briefly reviewed the projected tax impact (Slides 25-27), breaking down projected tax rates for the budget as currently posted; FDK Option 1; and FDK Option 3. He reviewed other considerations, including:

- Unreserved Fund Balance
- City Valuation in October
- Review Budget in October

Mr. Cogswell opened the meeting for public comment, noting that speakers would be limited to 5 minutes each

Concord resident Betty Hoadley expressed concern about Board members mentioning both local and state tax rates, as the Board has no control over the latter. She emphasized that the Board has three options: the two options including FDK, as well as the budget as currently posted, which does not include FDK. She disagreed with a previous comment that not much will change between now and the next school year, remarking that staff retirements could increase notably with the number of tenured teachers in the District. She added that if Title I guidelines change, this could drastically affect funding for public school districts. She was also concerned with proposed state bills favoring charter schools, which could gut adequacy grants. She re-emphasized that any budget that commits the District to FDK will be dependent on grant funding, which is not guaranteed. She noted she was particularly bothered by the tuition element of a FDK program, explaining that the District has no way of knowing how many families would actually pay, making revenue estimations unreliable at best. She felt that parents would likely be concerned about needing to pay kindergarten tuition on top of higher taxes. She echoed many of Ms. Patterson's earlier comments and hoped the Board would take these into strong consideration and exercise patience, as the District is operating in a climate of uncertainty both at a federal and state level. She added that, while desirable to many families, FDK does not present a crisis on the level of the Concord Steam closure issue. She again urged the Board to act with caution and moderation, as there are plenty of ways this budget could come to jeopardy that are out of the Board's control. She noted that Board members should not worry about the people who will be unhappy with the budget decision as this is not a popularity contest, and that Board members were elected specifically to make difficult decisions while balancing both the needs of students and taxpayers' ability to pay. She added that students are not in any greater need than they have been for many years, that a misstep here could bring the wrath of the Concord community, and restoring their faith in the Board could take decades.

Danielle Smith is a Concord mother with a child currently in the pre-K program who will be entering kindergarten in the fall. She commented that she is fortunate enough that half-day programming works for her family, but that she is willing to pay tuition as

she knows her daughter would thrive in FDK. She added that she has spoken with peers who have expressed a desire for FDK, even if tuition is required.

Former Concord City Councilor John Cassidy thanked the Board for its hard work, particularly with money and taxes being the bottom line to all decisions. He expressed appreciation for all the work and hours Board members have put in, as well as for their accessibility and transparency. He suggested that Board members should vote their consciences, as they have heard testimony both for and against aspects of this budget.

Mr. Cogswell encouraged Board member discussion prior to voting.

Ms. Higgins stated that perspective is everything. She said she agreed with all public commentary, particularly the sentiment that all Concord 5-year olds deserve FDK, and that the Board should vote their consciences, as that is their role. She made a motion that the Board defer FDK funding for one year, and that the Board and the administration make a concerted effort to prioritize FDK for September 2018 for all students. Ms. Patterson seconded the motion for the purpose of discussion. No vote was taken on this original motion (it was amended later in the meeting and voted upon.)

Mr. Croteau asked that the Board consider an addendum to the motion, as he would like a FDK curriculum brought to the full Board for discussion, as well as a plan for space and transportation. He echoed Mrs. Hoadley's comments that there is no way to accurately know what next year's budget climate will be like ahead of time. He also expressed a desire for an assessment process to determine how successful FDK is when it does get implemented. He stated a commitment to finding a way to fund FDK without taking away teachers or programs, but acknowledged that the Board and administration need time to do it right.

Mr. Richards stated that he understands there will always be costs associated with FDK, and that he agrees with much of what Mrs. Hoadley said. He added that he does not believe the Board has the time or facts to consider the options presented on Monday; though these options are well-crafted, the Board simply has not had enough time to reflect on them. He added that even the middle class in Concord would be pinched financially with a program that would not cover all families, at a still-high price tag. He also did not think tuition would sit well with the community. He added that he is still committed to FDK this year, and that he thinks Ms. Higgins' earlier motion was a good one. He noted that while the District cannot predict what will happen next year, it can and should spend the remainder of this year planning and preparing.

Ms. Wicks agreed with much of what Mr. Richards said. She noted that the public feedback she received was mixed regarding tuition, and echoed previous sentiments that raising the rate while also charging tuition would be unacceptable to many people. She added that she would support Ms. Higgins' proposed motion. She noted that the tax rate increase would already be high with no additional programming, and that she would like to at least make a commitment to FDK, even if it does not happen this year.

Mr. Cogswell emphasized that the budget is driven dramatically by staffing, and that the only way the District would be able to pay for FDK would be by decreasing staff, thereby increasing class sizes.

Mr. Fennessy thanked the administration for providing so many options in an effort to make FDK fit into the budget this year, noting that he has been in full support of FDK for all students this year, and that the sentiment seems to be moving in the direction of taking steps to make it happen. He felt that Option 3 would be the best way to do this, echoing earlier comments about receiving negative feedback regarding tuition. He added that tuition for kindergarten could be a slippery slope to tuition for subsequent grade levels down the road. He stated that Option 3 would provide the opportunity for at least half of kindergarten students to receive FDK at no additional cost, and that the other half would be able to opt in and pay tuition. He echoed other Board members' agreement with Mrs. Hoadley's point that the District does not know what the actual revenue would be. With regard to Ms. Higgins' motion, he stated that he was not sure whether the Board could bind a future Board to FDK for next year, but that Option 3 would be a good step for kids this year.

Ms. Patterson stated that she trusts the Board's democratic process to come up with a good result, with Board members voting their consciences. She added that regardless of how the Board voted, she would like to give the administration free rein to determine the best use of Title I funding, whether or not FDK is part of that. She also stated that she could not support Option 3, as she had concerns about it from an equity perspective. She was also concerned about this tenuous political environment and the possible ramifications of financially committing to something for next year. She noted that she does want to implement FDK when the time is right.

Alana Kimball suggested that the District consider a 2018 pilot program with one FDK class per school and use a variety of metrics to measure academic and social-emotional data and with parent input to then compare to data from the current half-day program. She added that the administration and Board could use these data to show the actual benefit of FDK on students.

Mr. Fennessy expressed concern with a one-year pilot program, as several years would be required in order to gather adequate data. He added that the Board has discussed many FDK options over years, and hoped some action could be taken this year.

Ms. Redmond-Scura noted that she did not personally hear much feedback regarding tuition, but that what she did hear was diametrically opposed to Option 3. She noted that the general sentiment was that separate tuition and Title I-funded programs felt unfair, as students' ability to attend with or without tuition would depend simply on what school they were zoned to attend. She added that she was uncomfortable with shifting current Title I funds, as this money is not static year after year and she does not want to disadvantage RMS students currently relying on this programming. She expressed empathy for parents, who of course want the best for their children. She noted that the Board cannot do everything it wants to do all at once, and she thought right

now it was forced. She added that this Board cannot bind the next Board to FDK programming, but that it can name FDK as its number one priority.

Mr. Cogswell commented that he accepted not implementing FDK this year, and that he would feel good if he knew next year's Board was fully committed to FDK, and therefore would support Ms. Higgins' motion.

Ms. Wicks stated that she wished the District could have run a FDK pilot program this year, and she felt the District could offer kindergarten for all students (rather than one class per school) and still gather data. She said she feels offering only one class per school would single out students and would be neither fair nor equitable; she would like to see data, but worried about a limited pilot program excluding some.

Mr. Cogswell opened the floor again for public comment.

Concord resident and former School Board President Kass Ardinger noted that she agreed that giving the administration and the Board time to brainstorm and develop a plan would be a very good idea. She asked the Board to consider the un-guaranteed nature of state and federal funding, adding that the Board should develop a priority list. She stated that she would like the Board to be sure not to lose sight of the RMS issue. She said the need at RMS has been sidetracked by the FDK issue, in spite of the fact that the Board has already paid for a study to evaluate the building and associated options. She emphasized that the Board should not ignore this issue and should move forward with that planning process, as the critical needs at RMS are longstanding. She noted that she was relieved that FDK would not be in the budget this year.

Mrs. Hoadley asked that Board members to be sure to leave politics out of Board meetings and that those issues should be taken up at the state house. She added that she felt the Board had been impatient with the FDK issue this year, and that there have actually been too many options and too much discussion about implementation, and not enough time to plan and set guidelines and standards. She echoed Ms. Ardinger's comments about not forgetting RMS, and suggested the Board equally prioritize RMS students and kindergarten students.

Ms. Patterson made a motion to pass the budget as it was amended on Monday, March 27. Mr. Croteau seconded the motion.

I move that the School Board vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$85,043,939 and to adopt the budget for fiscal year 2017–2018 as revised on March 29, 2017 inclusive of the following deposits to existing funds or expendable trust funds:

Vocational Capital Reserve fund for an amount up to \$130,253

Facilities and Renovation Trust Fund for an amount up to \$104,500

Food Service Fund for an amount up to \$75,000

Renovation and Maintenance Trust Fund for an amount up to \$73,790

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

Vocational Capital Reserve for an amount up to \$140,000

Mr. Richards proposed that the Board add a teacher position (\$92,000) to the Superintendent's contingency budget line. Mr. Dunn informed the Board that it can vote to amend the budget in October, with 7 votes required to make any changes that would increase spending. Mr. Richards asked if the administration is satisfied with the one teacher position currently budgeted in the contingency. Superintendent Forsten noted that the contingency currently contains 1.5 teacher positions, with the .5 representing a potential kindergarten teacher position, and that she was comfortable with this number at this time. Ms. Patterson commented that if a motion was to be made in October to add a teacher to the Superintendent's contingency, she would support it.

The Board voted 9-0 (motioned by Ms. Patterson, seconded by Mr. Croteau) to pass the budget as amended on Monday, March 27.

Ms. Higgins moved that the Board commit to make a concerted effort to create an action plan to look at data, funding, transportation and space needs, etc. in order to adequately implement FDK for the 2018-2019 school year.

Ms. Patterson requested clarification regarding providing a directive to the Instructional Committee, and Mr. Richards added that the administration and the Board would provide a list of tasks that need to be completed by September, 2017.

The Board voted 9-0 (motioned by Ms. Higgins, seconded by Ms. Patterson) to commit to a planning process for FDK next year.

The Board voted 9-0 (motioned by Mr. Cogswell, seconded by Ms. Higgins) to adjourn.

The meeting adjourned at 7:49 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Tom Croteau, *Secretary*