

Concord School District Board of Education
Board Work Session #5
March 8, 2017

Board members present: *President* Clint Cogswell, Tom Croteau, Barb Higgins
Alana Kimball, Jennifer Patterson, Maureen Redmond-Scura,
Jim Richards (arrived at 5:40 p.m.), Pam Wicks

Board member absent: 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 5:34 p.m., noting that this was the fifth meeting to discuss the FY 2017-2018 Superintendent's proposed budget.

Superintendent Terri Forsten introduced a proposal to nominate Jim McCollum as Principal of Rundlett Middle School (RMS). Superintendent Forsten and Board president Clint Cogswell noted significant support from the RMS community for Mr. McCollum.

The Board voted 8-0 (motioned by Barb Higgins, seconded by Tom Croteau) to approve the recommendation of Jim McCollum as Principal of Rundlett Middle School.

The Board welcomed Mr. McCollum to the District as Rundlett's Principal.

Superintendent Forsten introduced the current proposed budget option, based on feedback from previous meetings. Jim Richards arrived at 5:40 p.m. Mr. Cogswell asked for clarification regarding the following line items in the proposed budget:

- General supplies – Business Administrator Jack Dunn explained that much of this is to purchase playground mulch.
- Professional service for pupils – Mr. Dunn explained that this item is Bill White staff salaries (special education services).
- Salaries of managers – Mr. Dunn explained that that includes drop-out prevention and Central staff salaries.
- New furniture and fixtures – Mr. Dunn explained that most of this amount is furniture for a theoretical full-day kindergarten program, and will not apply if full-day kindergarten is not instituted.
- Replacement vehicles – Mr. Dunn and Mr. Cashman explained that this is to purchase a new plow truck.

- Dues and fees – Mr. Dunn said that he would review this line item and get back to Mr. Cogswell.
- Student transportation – Mr. Dunn explained that this is the cost of out-of-district and homeless transportation.
- Prepaid Masters', CEA – Mr. Dunn explained that this is a program in which the District provides pre-payment for certain employees who sign up for a Master's degree program, rather than reimbursing them after completion.
- Conference and travel, CEA – Mr. Dunn and Mr. Prince explained that this is part of the negotiated CEA contract. Mr. Croteau asked for clarification. Mr. Prince explained that this is part of contract negotiations and is an amount of money set aside for professional development conferences and workshops.

Superintendent Forsten reviewed an updated early education scenario which would use Title I funds to create an extended-day program focused on kindergarten students with Title I learning needs. She noted that this would eliminate Title I programs at the middle school level, and explained that the District is not currently using those middle school funds fully, so the funds would be more beneficial at the elementary level. This would provide full-day kindergarten programs for approximately 30% of the District's current kindergarten students and would not affect the budget, as it would be grant-funded.

Jennifer Patterson asked what percentage of the Title I/ELL population would be reached by this proposal, and if the Board would need to make a decision on this right now, if it would not impact the budget. Superintendent Forsten explained that the scenario was offered as something else for the Board to consider, but that the Board did not need to make a decision right now. Barb Higgins asked for the administration's reasoning for developing this option, and why this would be better than keeping things as they are. Superintendent Forsten explained that there have been ongoing discussions regarding Title I funding at the middle school level in light of needs at the elementary level. She noted that various studies have shown that early intervention may mitigate the need for these programs at upper grade levels. Mr. Croteau asked how the District could fully meet the needs of all eligible students should they want to take advantage of these programs, and Superintendent Forsten explained that not every free- or reduced lunch-qualified student is struggling academically, so that this large (~40%) population would not necessarily match the need for these programs. Jim Richards noted that the benefits which needier children receive from full-day kindergarten may be related to the inclusion of the general student population rather than the existence of the program.

Superintendent Forsten then presented a summary of the three full-day kindergarten options and their budget implications:

SCENARIO 1	SCENARIO 2	SCENARIO 3
Full-Day Kindergarten All students (100%) District Funds \$1,159,697	Half-Day & Full-Day .67 Half-Day, .33 Full-Day (select students) District Funds \$392,129	Title I Extended Day 90 students (30%) Grant Funds \$0

Mr. Dunn presented the updated budget option spreadsheet, noting the following adjustments:

- Mill Brook School – additional ELL Teacher – no budget impact
- Community Education – maintain in budget proposal – not a reduction
- Bond payment - additional cost – based on actual payment

Mr. Cogswell asked each Board member to provide individual feedback regarding including a full-day kindergarten program in next year’s budget.

Ms. Patterson emphasized that the Board should be putting forth the budget it would most like to support, collectively. She stated that her personal inclination was not to include full-day kindergarten in the budget this year, based on the timing of other large budget items which the Board cannot control, such as increases in New Hampshire Retirement System (NHRS). Ms. Patterson noted that in November she felt it was valuable to include full-day kindergarten in the budget discussions, but was later concerned about its impact on current programs, noting staff reductions causing larger class sizes. She reflected back on the District’s emphasis on equality and inclusion during the elementary school consolidation of several years ago, and noted that a partial full-day kindergarten program that is not available to ALL eligible children is in direct conflict with the concepts of equality and inclusion. She noted that the concept of charging tuition is also a point of concern for her. She stated that Board members are obligated to act in the best interests of the student community, and that it feels risky to implement programs contingent on grant funding given the current political climate. She added that the Board will not know until June whether full-day kindergarten funding in the governor’s proposed budget will pass. The District is already doing a great deal to help the populations that would be most impacted by full-day kindergarten. She noted that while the entire Board supports the concept of full-day kindergarten, the costs and inclusiveness of such a program and the resultant tax impact are significant concerns. She re-emphasized that now is not the time to institute a full-day kindergarten program as the District is not in a good position financially to institute a program for ALL students – only a subset. The tax increase, even without a full-day kindergarten program, is still significant, and she pointed out

that it is not the Board's role to protest the state's lawmaking – it is the responsibility of citizens who are not in a tax rate-responsible role, as Board members are.

Ms. Higgins noted that none of the Board members seem to feel good about any of the full-day kindergarten options, based on proposed staff reductions that would impact class sizes and resulting tax increases.

Mr. Croteau stated that full-day kindergarten is a good idea educationally and socially; however, increasing class sizes is a major concern both for students and teachers, particularly considering a steady increase in the needier student populations. He stated that maybe this year is just not the right time, and that healthcare and retirement costs are unlikely to decrease next year. He noted that he has received both calls and emails from taxpayers, some expressing interest in full-day kindergarten, but more expressing concern over the increasing tax burden on local taxpayers. He stated that he also is very passionate about Rundlett Middle School, as that school will soon need much refurbishing or an entirely new building. Full-day kindergarten programs will not be funded with bond money – this will be a direct tax burden. He emphasized that the District's current early education programs are excellent, and that not including a full-day kindergarten program in this year's budget would not harm any student populations. He stated that he feels a duty to serve both the students and the adults in the community: the adults who may not be able to handle a huge tax increase, and the students who would benefit from full-day kindergarten. He noted that Board members have a duty to be mindful of both things at all times, and that this is not the only tax increase that Concord residents will feel this year – there will be more down the road from the city and other sources.

Maureen Redmond-Scura explained that she has reached out to and heard from taxpayers on both sides of the full-day kindergarten issue, with more people concerned over the tax burden than in support of including full-day kindergarten this year. She explained that studies have shown that instituting full-day kindergarten becomes a “slippery slope” to 100% community participation. She stated that she feels that the overall trend is moving away from preschool-aged children staying home and moving toward full-day kindergarten-type options. She echoed Mr. Croteau's sentiment that the District's current schools and programs are excellent and that to lose that quality in order to make this change would be unwise. While it would be great to be able to add a program without losing other programs, that scenario creates an enormous tax burden. She re-emphasized the District's philosophy of equality and inclusion and how Concord's status as a heavy refugee-resettlement city means teachers are teaching an enormous span of needs, from very needy/ELL students to very advanced students. To ask teachers to have additional students to their classrooms in order to add this extra program would cut into what the District is doing well, and would be unfair to current students, while adding full-day kindergarten without reducing current staff is an enormous burden on the taxpayer. Her overall feeling was that now is not the right time.

Jim Richards began by pointing out that taxes are still going up whether the Board institutes full-day kindergarten and, with that in mind, he has kept as open a mind as

possible and tried to solicit as much feedback as possible. He noted that most people have said to him to go ahead with full-day kindergarten, stating that the focus should be on the children, and that they are angrier about rising retirement, healthcare, and special education costs than about full-day kindergarten costs. He added that this seems like an issue of punishing kids versus not wanting to be the ones to raise taxes, and that while the Board may not *measure* all the right things, it should *address* the right things. He states that he is currently in favor of full-day kindergarten because the difference between the imminent tax rate increase excluding full-day kindergarten and the options including it is comparatively small. He stated that, if not this year, the Board should work to be able to afford it next year. He additionally noted that current larger classes were “made to work” this year, but added that he does not like the concept of larger class sizes and hopes the Board can find areas to cut other than teachers. He expressed a belief that parents who expressed interest in full-day kindergarten did so because they feel it is best for their kids, not as a cop-out or for convenience. He emphasized that the Board needs to look at full-day kindergarten on its merits and should work to fund it if they feel it is valuable enough. He added that if it does not happen this year, he will continue to work for it in subsequent years.

Barb Higgins noted that not including full-day kindergarten in this year’s budget does not mean Concord would never implement a full-day kindergarten program; it simply means the Board needs to take more time to ensure the community can financially support such a program. She felt it would be irresponsible to include a full-day kindergarten program benefiting 4-5-year-olds at the expense of middle school programming or building improvements.

Pam Wicks emphasized that she campaigned and won her Board seat primarily on the issue of full-day kindergarten, as many of her constituents are in favor of such a program. She has heard from more people who want it than from those who do not. She expressed a feeling that if full-day kindergarten does not go into the budget this year, it may never go in, due to changing budget needs year-to-year. She noted that if the Board were to include it in the proposed budget and the subsequent public hearings indicated heavy opposition, the budget could be amended to remove the program. She would personally prefer to include the program in the budget and have to remove it due to public opposition than vice-versa. She acknowledged concerns over the tax rate and remarked that she would, personally, happily pay the tax increase to include full-day kindergarten without staff reductions, but noted that she is aware that this does not represent everyone’s financial situation. She also emphasized that though she supports full-day kindergarten, increasing class sizes are a concern to her.

Alana Kimball explained that this is a very personal issue as this decision would affect her own child. As an educator, she sees the benefit of full-day kindergarten for all groups of children, but fears larger class sizes, echoing Ms. Redmond-Scura’s sentiment about an undue burden on teachers needing to meet the educational needs of a vast range of student abilities, particularly with increasing class sizes. She noted that she does not want to sacrifice the quality of education of elementary and middle school students for full-day kindergarten.

Mr. Cogswell stated that he is a strong advocate for full-day kindergarten, as studies have shown that the neediest student populations benefit from early childhood intervention, thereby potentially mitigating rising special education costs. He noted that despite this, he would likely not support full-day kindergarten in this year's budget due to the already-hefty tax burden. He explained that community members he has heard from are largely in favor of not hiking the tax rate in order to fund full-day kindergarten this year. He then asked the Board to create a motion for whether or not to include full-day kindergarten in the posted budget.

Ms. Patterson made the following motion, seconded by Mr. Croteau:

That the Concord School Board NOT include full-day kindergarten in its posted budget for the FY 2017-2018 school year.

Mr. Dunn and Superintendent Forsten clarified for Board members that a yea vote represented an agreement that full-day kindergarten NOT be included in the posted budget, and a nay vote represented an opinion that full-day kindergarten BE included in the posted budget.

The Board voted 5-3 (those in favor: Barb Higgins, Jennifer Patterson, Clint Cogswell, Tom Croteau, Maureen Redmond-Scura; those opposed: Alana Kimball, Jim Richards, Pam Wicks; absent: Nathan Fennessy) to approve the above-named motion (motioned by Ms. Patterson, seconded by Mr. Croteau).

Mr. Dunn delineated the below motion for the Board to formally approve the preliminary FY 2017-2017 budget:

That the School Board post the Preliminary 2017-2018 Fiscal Year Budget for all funds of \$84,853,512 with the General Fund portion totaling \$79,524,388 with an amount of \$56,097,882 to be raised in local and state taxes.

The Board voted 8-0 (absent: Mr. Fennessy) to approve the above-named motion (motioned by Ms. Higgins, seconded by Mr. Croteau).

Upcoming public hearings:

- Monday, March 20 at 7:00 p.m. at Mill Brook School – multi-purpose room
- Wednesday, March 22 at 5:30 p.m. at Rundlett Middle School – library-media center

The Board voted 8-0 (motioned by Ms. Patterson, seconded by Ms. Higgins) to adjourn.

The meeting adjourned at 7:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Tom Croteau, *Secretary*