

Board of Education, Concord School District
Special Board meeting
January 13, 2020

Board members present: Tom Croteau, Barb Higgins, Jennifer Patterson, Liza Poinier, Danielle Smith, Jim Richards, David Parker, Gina Cannon

Board member absent: Chuck Crush

Administrators: *Interim Superintendent* Frank Bass, Donna Palley, *Business Administrator* Jack Dunn, *Director of Facilities* Matt Cashman, *Director of Student Services* Bob Belmont

Board president Jennifer Patterson opened the meeting at 5:34 p.m., noting that this special meeting was scheduled at the Board's request for the purpose of hearing a high-level preview of FY20-21 budget factors in advance of the regularly scheduled Budget Work Sessions that would begin on February 10. She reviewed the agenda, which included personnel, FY21 budget development Board discussion, FY21 budget dates, FY22 outlook, copier contracts, athletics, and public comment. Interim Superintendent Frank Bass offered an estimated anticipated increase in the budget of \$1.75 – \$1.8 million in salaries/benefits after the initial pass of discussions and reviews.

Business Administrator Jack Dunn offered a moment of silence for the recent deaths of Gary Jenkins, a bus driver for the District, and Edwina Czajkowski, a former employee who initiated the highly-regarded White Farm science program, Project SEE.

Mr. Dunn provided a preview of FY21 budget considerations, including expenditures in personnel, technology and facilities; and revenue in fees, local tax rate, state education tax and grants. He reviewed the proposed FY21 Work Session dates and noted that this was a draft schedule that Board members could amend as needed.

Ms. Patterson explained to the new Board members that this was a typical budget meeting schedule, with each session focused on a specific area of the budget. She emphasized that Work Session #8, CRTC and CHS enrollments, was particularly important, as it would address staff needs, school enrollments, and class schedules. Tom Croteau commented that while Mr. Dunn and the other administrators were excellent at answering questions, it was generally best to present questions or discussion topics ahead of time, so they had time to gather data and prepare responses before the next meeting. Mr. Dunn opened the meeting for Board member questions and discussion.

Ms. Patterson asked if Mr. Dunn was able to provide an estimate or talk through the rough baseline budget number; Mr. Dunn explained that this process had just begun, and he was unable to provide numbers yet. Jim Richards asked why the dates had been flipped for the Work Sessions discussing capital facilities and salaries; Mr. Dunn explained that this was in part to give HR more time to prepare, as some staff members have been out of the office and needed more time to gather necessary information. He

added that facilities and debt service was a large and important section of the budget; he wanted to emphasize their importance and ensure Board members had enough time to understand and discuss those areas.

Interim Superintendent Bass explained some of the big-ticket and important budget considerations, which include potentially hiring a District Compliance Officer, a School Resource Officer (SRO) at the middle school, and expanding support systems at the elementary level, which could entail BCBA's (Board-Certified Behavior Analysts), social workers, and/or additional special education staff. He described the possibility of a District pilot program, including shared educational assistants at Mill Brook School to help in kindergarten classrooms, and looking at novel ways to help offset costs of social workers and BCBA's. Dr. Bass emphasized his goal to reallocate unused or underused areas within the budget so these funds would be allocated to areas of demonstrated need. He added that he had met with the building Principals to determine their top priorities and was working to determine what made the most sense for each school while being judicious about what the budget could feasibly support.

David Parker asked if analysis had been done when examining these priorities and requests, what had been spent, and if data were gathered to assess efficacy. Dr. Bass noted that he had analyzed areas in the budget where funds were underused or unused and determined where that money might be needed and used more efficiently; this included analyzing needs building by building, to categorize where behavioral issues tended to cluster and to allocate resources to address these issues most efficiently. He explained the need to assess those behavioral issues on a case-by-case basis, as these were unique, individual cases and there was not a "one size fits all" solution. He suggested collaborative meetings among staff and families, as it was important to involve families, to best help with a child's needs. Donna Palley commented that the SWIS (Schoolwide Information System) program was a useful tool for sharing information within the District.

Danielle Smith asked for an update on the elementary Assistant Principals, how those positions were working out, and whether those roles had addressed some of the behavioral issues in the elementary schools. Mr. Croteau thanked Dr. Bass for his analysis and echoed Ms. Smith's question about the Assistant Principals. He recalled last year's discussions about hiring a Communications Director and said he felt it should have been considered more strongly then and should be on the table for discussion this year. Ms. Patterson and Dr. Bass described productive discussions with CHS interim principal Mike Reardon; and that some items that should be under consideration included a potential additional Social Worker, Guidance Coordinator, and other staff to address areas of need. Dr. Bass added that he felt the duties a Communications Director would perform fall under the purview of the Superintendent and that he or any other person in this position should have the skill set to fulfill those needs.

Ms. Patterson brought up athletic programs and their sustainability within the budget. Barb Higgins provided an anecdote of a recent experience she had with the Robotics Club at CHS, noting that the program was currently entirely self-funded and that the Board

might find a way to provide some funding within the budget for this and similar programs, instead of focusing almost solely on athletics. Ms. Palley noted that the Robotics Club had received substantial state support and grants for the last several years.

Gina Cannon asked for clarification on the new positions mentioned earlier by Dr. Bass and whether these were administrative roles. Dr. Bass and Mr. Dunn explained that none of the roles was administrative: the Guidance Coordinator was not a new role; other possible roles fall into the teacher group; and the SRO was an outsourced City of Concord police officer paid at a 75/25 split with the City, with the District paying 75%. Mr. Dunn added that the Compliance Officer and Social Workers were unaffiliated (i.e. non-union) positions. Mr. Richards clarified that Mr. Dunn would provide a line-by-line proposed budget compared with last year's, to add clarity to the overall picture.

Mr. Parker stated that he felt there was less a need for a Communications or PR Officer than there was a need for transparency from the District and the Board; that it was important that both parties communicated honestly and effectively with the community. Liza Poinier echoed Mr. Croteau's earlier thought about considering a Communications Director in the budget process, as there was a great deal of value in such a role. She added that these duties were not a "frill," and that having strong communications was important and something the District should aspire to. Ms. Cannon added that this role might also help with recruiting a more diverse staffing pool. Mr. Croteau suggested that perhaps developing a brief job description for the role would be a good starting point, as it would provide clarity for the goals for the role and help the District in the long run. He volunteered to work with Ms. Poinier to develop this document.

Mr. Dunn provided budget data for two types of staff positions: a teacher and an educational assistant. An average teacher position was budgeted at \$99,581.81, which consisted of \$59,784 in salary and \$39,797.81 in benefits and retirement. An average educational assistant position was budgeted at \$30,412.14, which consisted of \$19,864.65 in salary and \$10,547.49 in benefits. Mr. Parker asked for the average wage of the current population of teachers. Mr. Dunn explained that \$59,784 was representative of budgeting M5 on the teacher scale. Ms. Patterson added that salary scales were publicly available on the District website on the collective bargaining agreements page.

Mr. Dunn reviewed FY22 considerations, which included expenditures in the areas of salaries and benefits, the new New Hampshire Retirement System rate, health insurance costs, revenue within the State biannual budget, and State building aid. He explained that the State had lifted the moratorium on State building aid and that the District had filed a letter of intent to get on the list for this pool of funding. Ms. Patterson clarified that when the District received State building aid to build three elementary schools in 2011, the process was essentially first-come first-served, but now the process was primarily need-based and required more information and demonstrated need. Mr. Dunn noted that while this was a much more rigorous process with more stringent requirements, more funding would be received up front, meaning there would be less to bond. He added that the amount available was subject to the State's available funds, and that the District was in an advantageous position with the Board governing structure.

Mr. Dunn reviewed the District's copiers, noting that the current three-year contract with Canon is up for renewal in June. He explained that the previous vendor, Ricoh, had been in place for 10 years, and when the District switched from Ricoh to Canon, the Districtwide number of copiers was decreased and a staffed copy center was installed at CHS – a unique feature for any school District in the state. The renewal offer would renew for three more years (expiring in June 2023), waive the final two payments (\$61,070), add two more copiers at RMS, add additional equipment for the copy center, and change from a quarterly to an annual payment, a savings of roughly \$100,000. Ms. Patterson remarked that Canon was providing an excellent program with good technology, service and substantial value and savings for the District and that, given those circumstances, perhaps the copier contract would not need to go out to bid. Mr. Richards asked if the District could get an equally good value from another vendor. Mr. Dunn explained that switching to a new vendor would mean new machines, new software, new servers, new configurations, and staff training, and that those costs would be significant even if the District did go out to bid. Mr. Richards asked Mr. Dunn if he felt the current vendor was meeting the District's and Board's strategic needs, and Mr. Dunn responded that it was.

Ms. Cannon asked when the District was required to put something out to bid vs. making a discretionary decision. Ms. Patterson and Mr. Dunn referred to Board Policy #322 Bidding. Mr. Croteau asked Mr. Dunn to provide key points in simple language on why the District should keep Canon rather than bidding out for a new copier vendor. Mr. Dunn suggested that Canon had provided good service for the past three years with seamless software and technology and high quality, reliable machines. District IT staff was comfortable with the services. He added that the amount of work and money needed to change providers would be significant and was a major detractor from that option. Mr. Richards suggested that the Board vote whether to officially bypass the bid process.

The Board voted 8-0 to bypass the bid procedure pursuant to Policy #322 and authorize Mr. Dunn to continue the District's copier service with Canon (motioned by Ms. Higgins, seconded by Ms. Patterson).

Mr. Richards commented that he did not lightly support bypassing the bidding process, but had faith in the thoroughness and significant savings analysis Mr. Dunn provided. He asked that Mr. Dunn prepare an analysis of the service renewal proposal and associated savings to present to the Finance Committee.

Mr. Dunn presented the issue of the JV hockey budget, noting that the program was initially conveyed as revenue neutral, without an end date for when or whether it would cease being revenue neutral.

- Excerpt from the Instructional Committee minutes of September 5, 2018:
"A budget proposal to fund this program after the first year would need to be made through the regular District budget process." *page 1 of 5, Voted 4-0.*
- Excerpt from the Board meeting minutes of October 1, 2018:

“The Board voted 8-0 to approve the revenue-neutral addition of Junior Varsity Ice Hockey for the 2018-2019 school year” page 5 of 9, Voted 8-0.

Mr. Croteau said his understanding was that the program was a proposal rather than a firm budget line item. Ms. Patterson noted that the minutes from meetings when this was discussed were available on the District website, dated September 5, 2018 and October 1, 2018. Ms. Higgins asked if the issue was that the JV hockey program was now in the budget. Ms. Patterson said the assumption was that the program would be budget-neutral for FY18-19 and would be incorporated into the budget the following year, but that the Board had not specifically discussed the actual costs of the program or whether it would remain budget-neutral. She added she would like to see a presentation on the actual costs of the program. Ms. Poinier remarked that it might be worth reviewing other athletic programs and costs for students and programs with strong booster activity, as a way to determine if there are programs that may need more support. She referenced Ms. Higgins' earlier comments about support for the CHS Robotics Club and similar programs that reach larger student populations. Mr. Croteau expressed concern that such an analysis by the Board might set a precedent that sports programs were annually on the cutting block. He said there were many students, particularly at RMS, who could and did benefit from athletics programs, and the Board needed to be careful about how these programs were treated with respect to fairness for all students and families. Mr. Richards emphasized that this was the time of year these issues should be addressed as it was the beginning of budget season. Ms. Higgins noted that student engagement was very important, that there was a need to visualize the bigger picture, and that sometimes the way to reach students was through extracurricular programs, clubs and athletics, not just math and sciences, for example. Mr. Parker noted that the City offered many additional athletic and recreational programs and that the Board should review those community resources, as the District should not need to shoulder everything. He added that it was important to allow scholarships and boosters for some of these students.

Mr. Dunn noted that he and Dr. Bass have had meetings with City officials as part of the City and Community Relations Committee (formerly the Joint City Council/School Board Committee), in which they had discussed shared gym time, activity schedules, transportation for City programs, and other relevant topics. He noted that he would add the athletics topics to the curriculum and technology Work Session agenda. The Assistant Principal positions would be addressed at the Work Session on student services.

Ms. Patterson opened the meeting for public comment, in accordance with Policy #136.

Concord resident and 58-year taxpayer Betty Hoadley asked if Board policy #690.1 Athletic Philosophy and Guidelines, on adding and dropping sports, was ever discussed during the JV hockey discussions. She said she did not feel the Board was serious enough about how that program was budgeted, and emphasized that it was important that Board members were clear and persistent about requests for information and answers during the budget process. Ms. Hoadley noted that sabbatical applications should include specific information on how the applicant would grow professionally from their sabbatical time, and how they would share that growth and development with the

District. She emphasized that it was important when planning the budget to determine if there were any required procedures, such as documentation or legal needs. She noted that ideally, each Board member should have an area or two of expertise in which they could be an in-house expert. She added that it was important for committee members to check and be responsible for the veracity of meeting minutes to ensure meeting content was accurately recorded. She stated that being a Board member was a difficult role that required considerable work, and summarized her key points of advice to the Board: 1. Do not hesitate to ask penetrating questions, 2. Find out and be clear if something is a need or a want, 3. If you're on a committee, you own it – including any decisions and inconsistencies; if it came through your committee, it is yours. 4. Take advantage of the opportunity to correct the record and be sure the meeting minutes are accurate. Ms. Hoadley added that it was important to touch on student charges for activities and to examine which students were being served, as well as the relationship between City and school programs.

There was no further public comment.

Mr. Parker said that, as a new Board member, he brought fresh eyes to the situation and added that while history, protocol, and policies were important, fresh eyes and perspective were also important and had value, and that Board members should feel comfortable questioning everything.

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

The meeting adjourned at 7:12 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Barb Higgins, *Secretary*
Lauren Hynds, *Recorder*