

Concord School District Board of Education
Board Budget Work Session #4
Q&A Session, Full-Day Kindergarten, Scenario Proposals
February 22, 2017

Board members present: Clint Cogswell, *President*, Tom Croteau, Nathan Fennessy, Barb Higgins, Alana Kimball, Jennifer Patterson, Maureen Redmond-Scura, Jim Richards, Pam Wicks

Administration: *Superintendent* Terri L. Forsten, *Assistant Superintendent* Donna Palley, *Business Administrator* Jack Dunn, *Director, Human Resources* Larry Prince

Board President Clint Cogswell called the meeting to order at 5:41 p.m., noting that that the meeting would include time to discuss full-day kindergarten program scenarios and for the administration to respond to questions from the Board. Business Administrator Jack Dunn the presented the agenda items:

1. Q&A review
2. Discussion of full-day kindergarten programming proposals
3. Optional budget scenarios

Jennifer Patterson asked for a review of the question topics, which were as follows:

- Reductions proposed by administrators
- Enrollment & related staffing changes
- Special education
- Full-day kindergarten options – information
- 5% debt service
- Board member questions
- Past items for consideration
- Calculating the tax rate
- Bond proceeds

Mr. Dunn noted that many of the questions were elaborations or clarifications on topics covered at previous Board meetings.

Tom Croteau asked if a 3-hour program for special education students has been considered or discussed. Superintendent Terri Forsten clarified that staff has been distributed at the middle school level to help provide additional support for these students.

Maureen Redmond-Scura asked for clarification regarding out-of-district placements for preschool-aged children. Superintendent Forsten explained that under IDEA federal funding guidelines, the District is obligated to provide services for 3-5-year-old special needs students. The “out-of-district” for preschool refers to the community preschool providers who enroll students with special needs.

Assistant Superintendent Donna Palley provided information about students who are currently receiving support from Behavior Specialists at the elementary level. She noted that in September of 2016, there were 227 behavioral referrals related to significant behavioral incidents in the elementary schools by the five students in each school with the most referrals (25 students in all). In February of 2017, there were 123 referrals for these same students, a sizable reduction. Data about 3 students who work directly with a 1:1 Behavior Specialist was presented. These three students saw very significant reductions in behavioral incidents.

Superintendent Forsten reviewed the history of the Board’s consideration for full-day kindergarten, beginning with initial parent requests in fall 2015. She reviewed a hybrid option involving both full- and half-day kindergarten programs, with the key points as follows:

- This option offers 2 half-day programs and 1 full-day program at ADS, BMS, CMS and 4 half-day programs and 2 full-day programs at MBS
- The full-day programs would enroll a combination of ELL students and socioeconomically disadvantaged students
- The full-day programs would also have a lottery to enroll other students
- Can the District legally run a lottery for enrollment?
 - Superintendent Forsten noted that this is often the process used with special education preschool programs
 - The Board may consider charging tuition for those who are accepted through a lottery

Barb Higgins asked if the tuition would be comparable to current preschool rates; Superintendent Forsten responded that this has not yet been determined. Ms. Higgins added that a rate comparable to current preschool rates would be reasonable, as her own children had very positive experiences in similar programs. Ms. Patterson added that if the District instituted a tuition payment, it should have an opt-in program for those who are willing and able to pay.

Ms. Redmond-Scura noted that this hybrid program would primarily help special needs and ELL populations, without detracting heavily from the regular education program.

Ms. Higgins expressed concern about combining half- and full-day programs in terms of maintaining consistency in the programs for kindergarten students.

The discussion was divided between keeping the program as-is and doing the best job possible while planning for an all-day program in the future, or instituting a full-day program this year.

Mrs. Redmond-Scura reviewed her pro- and con full-day kindergarten list, noting that full-day kindergarten would have a bigger tax impact than building the three new elementary schools. She also remarked that the current system is arbitrary and that every parent of a five-year-old who has attended preschool immediately realizes that kindergarten is a shorter day, arranged so that one teacher can teach two classes, so this is an economic accommodation rather than what may be best for the children. She noted that, from the time she spent in a kindergarten classroom last fall, it was clear some students could use the extra time to fully learn the curriculum, and several parents have expressed concerns about their children's difficulties with transitions from various care facilities and school, so having them in one place for the full day would reduce some stress for those children. She said that she does not advocate for schools to provide childcare. She noted that it was also clear that full-day kindergarten would ease stress on families, which would then ease stress for the children, making it easier for them to learn and function in the classroom. She noted that adding full-day kindergarten would put Concord on a more even par with surrounding communities.

Mr. Cogswell expressed strong support for a full-day program based on the 40% of students eligible for the free and reduced-cost lunch program, and that research supports that this population will benefit from such a program. He also added that if the tax rate increases too much, the Board's favor with the community may dwindle. Ms. Patterson expressed a general support for a full-day program, but in a way that does not dramatically impact programs currently in place in the District. Ms. Patterson and Pam Wicks expressed concern about increasing class sizes due to staff decreases, as this relates to the quality of differentiated education.

Mr. Dunn emphasized the need to differentiate between operating expenses and long-term debt, highlighting the fact that many of the large budget items (the steam-to-gas conversion, out-of-district placements, New Hampshire Retirement System [NHRS]) are unavoidable costs the District would be paying regardless of a full-day kindergarten program.

Mr. Dunn introduced the budget option worksheet, explaining each option, its budget and practical implications, and its effect on the tax rate. [See accompanying worksheet.]

The discussion focused heavily on the need to balance the desire expressed by some in the community for full-day kindergarten without negatively impacting current educational programs and staff positions (thereby increasing class sizes), and significantly increasing the tax rate. Mr. Dunn emphasized that the majority of the built-in budget increases are attributable to increasing NHRS contributions.

Mr. Croteau asked about vocational education increases that he had noted while reviewing the budget summary; Mr. Dunn clarified that this was due to the addition of a health science teacher for Capital Region Technical Center (CRTC).

Mr. Dunn noted that he would continue pursuing kindergarten tuition options in case the issue is brought up at subsequent meetings.

Ms. Wicks and Jim Richards earnestly asked that community members please attend the upcoming Public Hearings to voice their opinions and experiences.

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

The meeting formally adjourned at 7:36 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Tom Croteau, *Secretary*