

Concord School District Board of Education
Board Work Session #7
March 27, 2017

Board members present: Clint Cogswell, Tom Croteau, Barb Higgins (arrived 5:37 p.m., 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 the seventh Work Session, to discuss the Public Hearings held on March 20 and 22, and to review the current posted budget. Business Administrator Jack Dunn then reviewed the night's agenda items:

1. World Language Programs
 1. RMS 0.80 Teacher reduction – introduced at Budget Work Session #1
 1. As changes to the schedule at RMS were considered, exploratories was impacted.
 2. \$50,000
 2. World Language exposure in Grade 7
 1. 10 days of exposure to each language: French, German, Latin, Spanish
 3. World Language opportunities in Grades 8 – 12
 1. Full-year courses
 2. Offer Language courses I - V
2. Coaches – Teachers, reduction in staff process
 1. Reduction process is outlined in CEA Collective Bargaining Agreement
 2. One-year-only positions
 3. Contracted for positions available as teachers are on leave
 4. When the teacher returns to their position, one-year-only contract is discontinued
 5. Teachers as coaches - great for students
 6. Teachers are welcome to apply for positions that may become available
3. Capitol Center for the Arts
4. Full-day kindergarten (FDK) – options
5. Debt service
6. FY17 Budget update

7. FY18 Budget adjustment (reminder)

Maureen Redmond-Scura reflected on feedback from last week's Public Hearings, in particular commentary from a former student who was tremendously impacted by the World Language program. Based on this and her own experiences, she emphasized that sometimes a struggling student is motivated by challenge.

Barb Higgins arrived at 5:37 p.m.

Tom Croteau and Mr. Cogswell echoed Ms. Redmond-Scura's comments regarding the personal impact of students who spoke at last week's Public Hearings.

Ms. Higgins noted personal experience with own daughter, who has a learning disability but enjoys and excels in her language class. She then stated that she had several questions regarding whether there will be teacher-coach layoffs once their contract positions are up. Superintendent Terri Forsten responded that this year has seen comparatively few retirements, so open positions are not as prevalent as in past years. She added that people are welcome to apply for positions as they open up. Larry Prince agreed that it is a low year for retirements and resignations.

Jim Richards echoed several Board members' earlier comments regarding the positive impact of teacher-coaches as role models and educators, and hoped the District could retain these positions if possible. Ms. Redmond-Scura added that student turnout at the March 22 Public Hearings was extremely impressive, and she wanted to commend those students for taking the time to participate.

Mr. Dunn then reviewed the Capitol Center for the Arts agreement, as below:

1. Agreement with CCA: Updated annually

The Concord School District will remit to the CCA \$10,000, which will be used to purchase tickets for our school time performances for students participating in the Literacy Arts Program (grades 1-3). The School District will, in turn, receive a \$2,500 credit toward rental fees for the Music in Our Schools performances scheduled for December and March. This credit includes the theatre and hall rental plus equipment, but does not cover labor supplied by the CCA.

2. Historical information: During the development of the 2010-2011 budget, there was a significant increase in costs to the District: the state pushed down all the retirement costs to the local municipalities; CRTC funding was proposed to be significantly reduced; Central Office and CAA forfeited any contracted raises; and the Board forfeited its annual stipend. The arts community also expressed concern about this reduction.

3. Budgeted: \$10,000

Superintendent Forsten reviewed FDK options, showing tuition data from a sample of other regional districts, including Bedford, Derry, Timberlane, Rochester, and Beverly, Massachusetts. (Slide 7) Donna Palley added that Derry has had this program in place for 9 years, and that just under 50% of families take advantage of FDK, while others participate in half-day programs. She noted similar responses from the Timberlane

District, and that 1st grade teachers are able to accommodate the differences presented by half-day vs. FDK skill development for students entering 1st grade. Superintendent Forsten reviewed several options currently feasible for CSD:

Tuition for FDK

- \$110/week, \$440/month
- Support current lack of full adequacy funding for FDK

Title I programs in the elementary schools

- Schoolwide schools (SWS) – based on higher free/reduced lunch recipients, all students in the school may participate in schoolwide programs
- SWS: Mill Brook School, Beaver Meadow School (anticipate fall 2017)
- Targeted assistance schools (TAS) – students must qualify through assessment to be part of this program
- TAS: Abbot-Downing School, Christa McAuliffe School (anticipate fall 2018)

Jennifer Patterson asked whether targeted assistance qualification was income-based, and Superintendent Forsten responded that it would be based on social-emotional and academic-based assessments. Ms. Patterson asked if the District would be losing funding that the Board should be aware of while making FDK decisions. Superintendent Forsten stated that she anticipated having Title I funds going into the next school year, but does not know how much or what the focus of the funding will be. She explained that some of these funds may be divided and shared with private or charter schools and was unsure of what that would mean for the District. Overall, the Board should anticipate that next year's budget should be similar to this year's. Superintendent Forsten pointed out that in order to support Title I FDK programs at the elementary schools, Title I funds would need to be pulled out from RMS, noting that research supports a higher benefit of early intervention programs.

Ms. Higgins asked if there would be backup programs available for RMS students who would lose their Title I programs; Superintendent Forsten explained that the administration is looking into alternate options for these students.

Mr. Croteau asked if, in the FDK scenarios presented involving tuition, \$110 would be a firm rate for all students, rather than a sliding scale. He also asked if students at SWS schools who do not individually qualify (according to financial ability or academic need) for Title I benefits would be able to participate in FDK by paying tuition. Superintendent Forsten responded yes to both questions.

Mr. Cogswell noted that the District would not charge tuition for children who receive free or reduced lunch services. Superintendent Forsten explained that if the District were to move forward with having SWS schools provide FDK with Title I funding, the District could not also provide funding to support FDK at the non-SWS schools, as this would be seen by Title I as supplanting, which is not allowed. Ms. Palley added that Title I funds cannot be used for programs already in place. Mr. Richards asked how other students in

this scenario would be able to access FDK, and Superintendent Forsten referred to several options on slide 9:

- Option 1
 - Tuition-based FDK at all schools (scholarships available)
- Option 2 – would preclude students without academic or social-emotional need at CMS and ADS. Could have a tuition option with this option, but would need to be separate from the Title I program.
 - SWS FDK at MBS and BMS
 - Targeted FDK at CMS and ADS
- Option 3
 - SWS FDK at MBS and BMS
 - Tuition-based FDK at CMS and ADS (scholarships available)
- Option 4
 - District funded FDK at all schools

Superintendent Forsten explained that the administration is examining staffing and programming options at RMS to maintain comparable services if Title I money were to be redistributed to the elementary schools for FDK programs. Ms. Patterson asked if Title I FDK curriculum would be different than tuition-based FDK curriculum, and if there would be a half-day option at MBS/BMS. Superintendent Forsten responded that programs would be the same from a curriculum perspective and that half-day programs could remain in place.

Nathan Fennessy asked for clarification regarding how schools qualify for SWS status. Superintendent Forsten explained that a school must have at least 40% of its students qualified for free and reduced-price lunch services, and that there is also a formal application process. She added that BMS is at end of that process and will be submitting its application to the DOE shortly. CMS earned its designation last week and has submitted an intent to apply. Mr. Fennessy asked when the District would find out whether the application is accepted; Superintendent Forsten explained that she anticipates a positive response, and that while the DOE may request more information, approval should be in place for fall of 2017 for BMS. Mr. Fennessy asked how much Title I money the District currently receives for RMS, and Superintendent Forsten gave a figure of just over \$1 million total, with approximately \$100K of that going to RMS.

Mr. Fennessy asked for clarification regarding tuition-based FDK models and whether the District would still have to offer half-day programming. Superintendent Forsten explained that the District, while not obligated to keep half-day programs, would still want to offer them as a transition option for families. Pam Wicks added that if the Board were to choose a tuition-based option, the District would need to set guidelines for families choosing half-day kindergarten vs. FDK.

Mr. Croteau noted that there are times when children should be grouped according to need, and other times when they should not. Regardless of which FDK program the District pursues, the administration and the Board should keep in mind that it might not

be in students' best interest to separate needier kids from regular or gifted kids. He also asked why the Board's options do not include a sliding scale tuition option, and worried about students who may slip through the cracks in a split Title I/tuition-based program. Mr. Richards added that creating two separate options (Title I/tuition program) might create these ability-based student groupings.

Superintendent Forsten provided a detailed review of the current FDK options, including cost breakdown and pros/cons. (Slide 10)

Mr. Fennessy asked for clarification regarding cost vs. anticipated revenue.

Superintendent Forsten explained that Title I revenue was not factored into these figures, and that the numbers reflect District costs and revenues. Mr. Dunn also clarified that these numbers reflect only what would hit the general fund and do not include any grant money, as this would need to be shown separately. Mr. Fennessy then asked about the current RMS Title I funds and what would happen to those funds; Superintendent Forsten explained that it is currently used for extended day and summer programming. She noted that the Title I summer programs would likely be eliminated if the Board voted in favor of a Title I-funded FDK program.

Mr. Dunn added that the tuition rate was developed based on school enrollment numbers calculated at the beginning of the school year – these numbers are estimates based on those data.

Ms. Higgins asked how much time the administration has spent putting together a FDK-specific curriculum in anticipation of possibly instituting FDK, and if this work is in progress. Ms. Palley responded that most of this curriculum is already in place, and the remainder would be developed during the professional development week right after school ends for the summer. She added that this would need to be a thoughtful process.

Mr. Dunn reviewed the District's debt service (Slide 11), explaining that the District was projected to deposit \$664,000 into the facilities and stabilization fund, but will only be depositing \$104,000 due to the new debt service payment for steam. The administration would have proposed that the steam savings of \$1,375,000 be used to pay for the new debt payment of \$736,000, but due to the request to add FDK, the administration proposed using the savings within the existing debt service to pay.

Ms. Patterson noted that the District is currently in the process of looking at the RMS building project, and that current budget needs are preventing the District from taking action on it this year.

Mr. Dunn then reviewed the FY17 budget update:

1. EXPENDITURES

1. Steam: estimated \$82,338*
2. Snow: estimated (\$15,000)*
3. SPED out-of-district (OOD) tuition: (\$537,000)**
4. Food Service: ???

2. REVENUE

5. Pilot: (\$14,000)

6. Community Education: (\$35,000)

7. Deerfield: (\$103,000)

3. UNRESERVED FUND BALANCE

8. \$964,000 (*as of today*) (*need \$1,325,000 for FY18*)

He also reminded the Board that the budget adds \$140,000 in expenditures for CRTC projects, but that this has no tax impact as it is funded by revenue from the CRTC Trust Fund.

Mr. Cogswell noted that the budget is in pretty good shape and that there has been excellent input, particularly regarding the issue of FDK. He also reminded the Board that FDK is currently not in the budget, and that there would need to be a vote if it were to be added back in.

Mr. Fennessy proposed a motion to add fully District-funded FDK back into the budget, explaining that community commentary seems to be heavily in favor of this. He added that the budget represents the Board's priorities, which should be focused on educational opportunities for students. Mr. Richards seconded this motion, which was then discussed by each Board member.

Ms. Higgins emphasized that no Board members or administrators believe FDK is a bad idea in and of itself, but there is much more to the decision than simply wanting one's children to have access to FDK. She explained that the population most excited for FDK seems to be parents of young children who would directly benefit, and that most of the people in favor of FDK can afford the tax hike and/or have young children of their own. She noted that many people spoke at the Public Hearings of moving to Concord because of its relatively affordable tax rate. She also commented that the community is split, and that regardless of the final decision, many people will be upset. She echoed Alana Kimball's comment that first grade teachers with whom she has spoken did not notice drastic developmental difference between kids who had attended FDK and those who had not. She emphasized that the Board needs to think about why FDK has come to the forefront now? Why today? This is something for everyone to contemplate. She also asked the Board to think about how FDK funding is achieved – it would either be on the backs of taxpayers, or through cutting existing programming for other students. She clarified that the Board is not dismissive of FDK, but that the Board simply needs to take many things into consideration before deciding whether or not to move forward.

Mr. Cogswell emphasized that his "why" is because children benefit from FDK. He noted that the District spends a lot of money in OOD placement, and if that figure can be mitigated with early intervention, then it would be worth it. If FDK can help some of the community's children, particularly the neediest population, FDK is 3% of the budget and would likely not fit back into the budget until after the RMS project.

Ms. Wicks noted that a comparison of Concord to Timberlane might not be accurate as Timberlane's demographic is overwhelmingly white, which is very different from the very diverse Concord population. She personally observed a huge need for FDK

programming, particularly at MBS, where there is a high population of low income/ELL/otherwise needy students – FDK could provide that jumpstart to their education. She does not want to pay for this at the expense of cutting teachers at the upper elementary or middle school level, however. She said she understands the high tax burden, but added that the budget situation will not change drastically next year, so the Board would continue to face the same issue next year and in subsequent years. She added that she has observed a number of public commenters without young children who are still in favor of FDK.

Mr. Croteau agreed that the District needs to take care of needy children. He is not sure what will change next year, but right now, looking at an enormous tax load, he has heard from members of the public who say they may not be able to retire here or afford to move here. He thinks a sliding scale tuition or scholarship-based program could help mitigate these issues, and does not want to take programming or teachers away from middle school kids. He is in favor of Title I programming for the neediest students, and sliding scale tuition for others, without removing Title I funding from RMS.

Mr. Fennessy echoed Mr. Cogswell's earlier comments regarding early intervention mitigating tremendous OOD costs, and said that waiting until middle school is much too late to get students up to grade level. He said he understands the significant cost, noting that right now the Board would be asking the taxpayers to pay 4.5% more this year regardless of FDK or any additional programs, and also cutting teachers. He said he sees a bigger problem with increasing the tax rate while not adding additional programs and services, and that the tax hike with FDK at least provides these programs for families who need it.

Mr. Richards stated that his observation of Public Hearings attendees was approximately 70-75% in favor of FDK, with strong vocal support against cutting teachers. He said the majority of people who have contacted him are in favor of FDK, regardless of age or having young children. He added that he agrees with Mr. Cogswell's earlier comments that FDK is an investment in children's futures that will pay dividends. He also noted that it is the Board's job to look at existing programs to adjust and be the most efficient spenders of budget money: that programs exist is not enough reason by itself to retain them, and that everything should be on the table, every year. He is in favor of FDK for all Concord students.

Ms. Redmond-Scura expressed that she feels she has been painted as "anti-child," which is very distressing to her as a lifelong educator and classroom volunteer. The FDK issue is neither easy nor simple, and it also reflects a cultural paradigm shift. When her own children were young, the general consensus was that young children benefit most from being in the home with their families. Now, it seems the general consensus is that young children should be in the classroom. She said she feels FDK is a good thing for those who want and need it, but that it will not solve every problem. She believes there is benefit to FDK and that, in a perfect world, the District could easily and affordably implement it. She spoke with an administrator at RMS who feels that removing RMS' Title I funds would not be tremendously detrimental because

those funds are not used as well as they could be. She said she fears driving people out of Concord with such a high tax rate, and personally knows many people who may plan on moving out of Concord since their children are out of school and they cannot afford the rising taxes. She feels a responsibility to all Concord residents and has heard passionate commentary on both sides of the issue.

Ms. Kimball agreed with many of Ms. Redmond-Scura's statements. She stated that she does not like hearing from community members who say they cannot afford to keep their homes with significantly increased taxes. She noted that the Board needs to be cautious about saying that FDK will lead to fewer OOD placements, as the state makes the District pay for these students. It should not fall on the taxpayer to pay for every single thing, and she does not believe FDK will mitigate special education costs as much as previously mentioned. She is also concerned about the cost of voucher programs to local school districts' budgets. She emphasized that numbers and line items reflect real-live children and teachers, and should be thought of as such, and not just as numbers. She added that the Board is comprised of nine people who will affect the tax rate, and Board members need to be very aware of that. She does not feel the District should cut programs from other grade levels to pay for FDK – the Board needs to find a middle road, and needs to see actual dollar figures for what programs will cost, i.e. FDK with no teacher cuts.

Ms. Patterson began by expressing agreement with many previous comments. She emphasized that this year's Public Hearings were excellent in terms of community participation, particularly student involvement. She said she feels that the Hearings solidified her opinion that the District should not cut programs or staff to pay for FDK when some of that responsibility should come from state/federal government. She noted that the funding problem is not with the District, it is with state funding of education. She believes in the positive impact of early education, and with 20+ years' experience being involved with school budget processes or state budget policymaking, feels her role as a Board member is to exercise her judgment as best as possible. She stated that her primary motivation was to support staff and maintain smaller class sizes at all levels, and that she trusts the administration to look at every possible cost savings, knowing there are no easy savings to be found this year. She likes the budget as posted (without FDK) and feels that the idea of equity and inclusion speaks very loudly, as this is an ideal for any school District. She feels that existing Title I programs are good, and is in favor of exploring additional Title I-funded programs. She stated that she feels cautious about charging tuition for FDK – she is open to persuasion but needs to see hard numbers. She worried that she does not fully understand the implications of each option and wants to make sure the District does not cut things without being fully aware of what is getting cut. She is most comfortable with waiting on FDK, but also cares deeply about finding the best possible solution.

Ms. Wicks noted that the current Title I extended day program at MBS has only 10 students – a very small number.

Mr. Richards emphasized that everyone on the Board has the best interests of children at heart, regardless of where they stand on the FDK issue. He added that Board members should consider the tax impact in terms of dollar amount rather than percentage.

Mr. Cogswell commented that he will vote against the motion on the floor (to add FDK back into the budget). He also stated a desire to make a motion (if the current motion does not pass) recommending the Board include FDK with tuition and Title I assistance.

The Board voted 6-3 (motioned by Mr. Fennessy, seconded by Mr. Croteau) to add FDK back into the budget (Option 4 – fully funded by District, no tuition). The Yea votes were Nathan Fennessy, Jim Richards, Pam Wicks. The Nay votes were Alana Kimball, Jennifer Patterson, Clint Cogswell, Tom Croteau, Maureen Redmond-Scura, Barb Higgins. The motion did not pass.

Mr. Cogswell made a motion to incorporate FDK with tuition. The motion failed for lack of a second.

Mr. Fennessy made a motion to table FDK with tuition pending more numbers from Mr. Dunn. Ms. Wicks seconded the motion.

There was no vote on this motion.

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

The meeting adjourned at 7:46 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Tom Croteau, *Secretary*