

Board of Education  
 Concord School District  
**Work Session #6 – Student services (continued) and open session**  
**March 9, 2020**

**Board members present:** Jennifer Patterson, Tom Croteau, Jim Richards, Danielle Smith, Liza Poinier, Chuck Crush, Barb Higgins (arrived at 6:03 p.m.), Gina Cannon, David Parker

**Administration present:** Frank Bass, *Interim Superintendent*, Donna Palley, *Assistant Superintendent*, Bob Belmont, *Director of Student Services*, Jack Dunn, *Business Administrator*

Board President Jennifer Patterson called the meeting to order at 5:32 p.m., noting that Board Work Session 6 would continue the Student Services discussion. Interim Superintendent Frank Bass directed the audience to ConcordTV for an interview he conducted earlier that day on precautions and measures the District was taking to address COVID-19. He also noted there were two finalists for the CHS Principal position and that full-day interviews would be conducted on March 13 and 18 with these candidates involving staff, parents and students. Jim Richards asked if the candidate information would be published on the website. Superintendent Bass assured him it would. Superintendent Bass noted that he, Jack Dunn, and Donna Palley recently met to discuss the budget and made approximately \$300,000 in reductions, to reduce the overall tax burden. He noted that even with nothing additional in the budget, it would be up 1.85% next year due to CBA negotiations and other items over which the Board had no control.

Ms. Palley reviewed the out-of-district (OOD) placement history, noting a decrease in District and foster placements and an increase in court-ordered placements. She added that expenses were partly offset by anticipated state revenue based on reimbursement formulas that shift annually, and by the District’s Special Education Trust Fund.

**OUT-OF-DISTRICT PLACEMENTS**

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
DISTRICT	22	17	20	22	17	13	11	14
COURT	3	1	3	9	8	8	11	14
FOSTER CARE	2	3	0	1	1	1	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>28</b>

- Anticipated placements for 2020-2021 include (6) elementary (4 court ordered); (5) middle; (17) high school (10 court ordered)
- The costs of private school out of district placements range from \$59,352 to \$288,345. (not including transportation)
- The number of students in out-of-district placements has increased slightly, partly as a result of several students moving into the District already in placement and court ordered placements
- In addition to the numbers below, 15 students without IEPs and 7 students with IEPs attend Second Start Alternative High School for all or part of their day. (Some of these students attend CHS for part of their day.)
- Expenses are offset by anticipated revenue from the State, based on reimbursement formulas that shift annually and by our Special Education Trusts Fund (balance)

Ms. Palley reviewed OOD costs, noting that in some cases the cost of transportation was significantly higher than the placement itself. Several Board members asked whether the costs reflected the total number of District students placed at each school or a per-student cost; Ms. Palley clarified that these were per-student costs. She added that the information presented was as broad as possible to protect student privacy, given the small number of students represented.

School	Tuition for School Year and Summer	Transportation	Total Cost
Contoocook School	\$61,800.00	\$46,125.00	\$107,925.00
Longview School	\$51,500.41	\$68,556.00	\$120,056.41
Spaulding Youth Center	\$140,834.58	\$46,350.00	\$187,184.58
Parker Academy	\$62,784.47	Varies	\$62,784.47 plus transportation
Easter Seals	\$288,345.15	NA	\$288,345.15
Crotched Mountain School	\$141,286.42	\$78,400.00	\$219,686.42

Ms. Palley explained how OOD placement revenue was calculated, noting that the District anticipated 70% would be reimbursed this year.

Reimbursement for court placements

- District pays up to three times the state average per-pupil cost (~\$48,683); state pays remainder

State special education aid for District-placed students

- District pays up to set per-pupil cap ( $\approx$  \$58,000 or 3.5 times the state average per pupil cost)
- State reimburses percentage of remainder (a percentage of cost between 3.5 times and 10 times average; 100% over 10 times);  $\approx$  70% this year

Chuck Crush asked if Second Start costs were included in the OOD placement cost numbers. Mr. Dunn and Ms. Palley explained that Second Start costs were separate; and \$238,000 had been budgeted for Second Start students, at a cost of \$15,000 per half-day placement. In response to a question about which schools were residential, Ms. Palley noted that Easter Seals was residential, and the others were day programs. Bob Belmont noted that last year, one student was placed residentially in Massachusetts by the courts and the District placed another, with one more anticipated to receive residential placement this year. Mr. Belmont explained that the District examined resources and supports available both in the school system and at home, to determine the best setting for a student for their educational needs. Mr. Crush asked for a total cost for OOD placements including Second Start. Mr. Dunn said he would look that up and provide the number. Ms. Palley provided data on student placements for several other large school

districts, demonstrating the number of students who exceed the state’s annual \$56,000 cap. She explained that Concord’s goal was to keep as many students in District as possible, hence the small number of OOD placements and large number of contracted services.

The number of students who exceeded the State Cap (≈ \$56,000)

DISTRICT	NUMBER
Manchester	45
Nashua	38
Rochester	28
Dover	18
Keene	16
Portsmouth	16
Concord	7

Ms. Palley reviewed the current list of outside providers the District, noting that William White Educational Consulting (WVEC) represented the largest service contract in the District.

- WVEC (autism and behavioral support)
- It’s Ability (physical therapy)
- Dr. Jeremy Brooks (clinical psychological services)
- Riverbend Community Mental Health (clinical services and professional development)
- AAC Voices (assistive technology/augmentative communication)
- Boothby Services (speech language pathology/occupational therapy)
- Northeast Passage (recreational therapy)
- Hear NH Audiology Consultants
- Assistive Technology for Education, LLC
- New England Low Vision
- Portsmouth Neuropsychology
- Institute on Disability (MTSS consultation and professional development)
- SERESC (MTSS consultation and professional development)
- Life is Good Foundation (trauma-responsive strategies)
- Various individuals/organizations for professional development

Ms. Palley described the three types of professionals employed through WVEC: consultants, behavior specialists and autism specialists.

**Consultant:** Master-degree-level experts; board-certified behavior analysts (BCBA), significant expertise in autism or mental health

- Assessment; creation of plans, data collection and analysis, modeling, training, assisting staff, parent and team meetings

**Behavior Specialist:** bachelor-level, experience in school or private setting, Registered Behavior Training (RBT) trained, with WWEC BCBA supervision

- 1:1 student or schoolwide support; de-escalation and crisis intervention; data collection; collaboration with student support staff to assist in implementation of preventive strategies and positive behavior support plans

**Autism Specialist:** NHDOE teacher certification, Master-degree-level, RBT trained, with WWEC BCBA supervision

- Curriculum development and implementation support, training staff, 1:1 and small group instruction; facilitate inclusion in classrooms

Ms. Palley described WWEC’s autism services, noting eight autism-related positions, with an additional amount of money related to professional development. She noted that these specialists assisted with student needs and curriculum development, and provided school-wide support as well as RBT training to District staff. A total of 89 students were served and 144 staff members impacted. She noted that District staff who had completed RBT training and received certification were supervised by WWEC staff three hours per month, similar to the supervision provided to Educational Assistants.

POSITION/SERVICE	LOCATION(S)	19/20	20/21	COST
Autism Consultant	All Schools	177	177	\$114,855.30
Autism Specialist	Preschool: MBS	177	177	\$62,350.02
Autism Specialist	Preschool: BMS	177	177	\$62,350.02
Autism Specialist	RMS/CHS	177	142	\$49,880.02
1:1 Behavior Specialist	<b>These 4 Specialists, serve 3 students</b>	177	177	\$49,288.42
1:1 Behavior Specialist		177	177	\$49,288.42
1:1 Behavior Specialist		177	177	\$49,288.42
1:1 Autism Specialist		177	177	\$62,350.02
Prof. Development	All	68	68	\$24,658.20
<b>TOTAL</b>				<b>\$524,305.84</b>

Total Number of Students Served: **89**

Total Number of Staff Members Impacted: **144**

(7) Students had 1:1 in '18-'19; (5) in '19-'20; (4) Projected '20-'21

(3) Students returned from OOD placements since February 2019, Supported by BWS staff and District EAs at CHS

In response to a question whether the WWEC contract was annual, Ms. Palley noted it was. Mr. Crush asked if there had been a contract in place two years ago, as he recalled hearing that there had been no contract in place at that time.

Barb Higgins arrived at 6:03 p.m.

Ms. Palley explained that an RFP had been issued two years ago; Mr. Crush requested an RFP be issued again this year. He asked how contracted services were monitored and how their quality was ensured and assessed. Ms. Palley noted that student outcome data and service assessments were in-depth and that WWEC could present this data to the Board. Ms. Patterson clarified that the focus should be on the budgetary impact and fee model

for services provided, and that an RFP was likely not feasible in the two weeks before the budget would be adopted. Mr. Crush expressed concern that WWEC costs seemed to be increasing rather than decreasing. Mr. Croteau noted that in the discovery process, no other organizations in the state were found that could provide a comparable level of services; Ms. Palley added that WWEC was the most cost-effective during that process. Ms. Patterson suggested gathering a list of items about which the Board would like more information, such as District goals for WWEC usage, and updates on service effectiveness. Superintendent Bass explained that WWEC provided the benefits of flexibility and coordination, as staff were coordinated by that organization rather than the District. He noted that a District-wide approach allowed for greater flexibility with the allocation of resources, and that he supported exploring whether another organization could offer services and/or cost-effectiveness that WWEC could not.

Gina Cannon asked if alternatives to BCBA's had been looked at for students on the autism spectrum. Ms. Palley noted that BCBA's were not the only approach used by WWEC's staff, and that their approaches were flexible, as they have many other areas of expertise and a broad spectrum of knowledge.

Ms. Palley described the behavioral/emotional support provided by WWEC, noting six behavior specialists, with 131 students served and 155 staff members impacted.

POSITION/SERVICE	LOCATION(S)	19/20	20/21	COST
Consultant	All Elementary	0	90	\$58,401.00
School-wide Behavior Specialist	ADS	177	177	\$49,287.42
School-wide Behavior Specialist	BMS	177	177	\$49,287.42
School-wide Behavior Specialist	BGS	177	177	\$49,287.42
School-wide Behavior Specialist	CMS	177	177	\$49,287.42
School-wide Behavior Specialist	MBS	177	177	\$49,287.42
Preschool Behavior Specialist	MBS/BMS	-	177	\$49,287.42
1:1 Behavior Specialist	For 1 elementary student	177	177	\$49,287.42
<b>TOTAL</b>				<b>\$403,412.94</b>

Total Number of Students Served: **131**

Total Number of Staff Members Impacted: approximately: **155**

In response to a question about the relationship between these contractors and the proposed student services positions, Ms. Palley explained that the new positions represented a demonstrated need for additional support in the schools. Mr. Dunn and Ms. Palley agreed to provide the percentage increase in WWEC costs. Mr. Crush asked whether WWEC staff were involved in student restraint and seclusion incidents. Ms. Palley and BGS Principal Susan Lauze noted that students did likely interact with WWEC staff given their behavioral-emotional support needs. Ms. Cannon asked for clarification on Special Education Coordinators having been replaced by elementary Assistant Principals, wondering why this change was made if the District now needed to hire more special education teachers. She asked how many special education teachers (both District staff and WWEC contractors), provided service to how many students District-wide. Ms.

Palley noted that three autism teachers move around the District, along with Occupational Therapists, Speech-Language Pathologists, etc. and that the core program was three special education teachers per elementary school. She added that teachers had been vocal about the need for additional support in the schools.

David Parker remarked that some students involved in seclusion/restraint incidents were special education students and some were not, and asked whether some aberrant behaviors triggered a referral to evaluate whether a non-coded student should be classified as such. Principal Lauze and Principal Scarpati explained that these instances often did trigger referrals for student evaluations and that incidents with non-coded students generally involved younger students.

Superintendent Bass clarified that the new proposed student services roles were not necessarily teachers, and that the positions were flexible, based on the needs of each school. He noted that requested positions could include social worker, school psychologist, BCBA staff member, or teacher, depending on need. Mr. Croteau asked what the District hoped to gain from these new positions and what was not working or was missing that the new staff would fulfill. ADS Principal Anthony Blinn noted that his need was for a social worker or a full-time school psychologist, as there currently was very little counseling available in the building. He estimated that the primary role of the current social worker, available only two days per week, was testing. Having a social worker on staff would be a good resource for student interventions and additional needs.

Principal Lauze explained that BGS needed a special education teacher, as current caseloads were high and could keep students from getting all the services they need. Principal Scarpati said MBS also needed an additional special education teacher, especially with the large number of incoming students from preschool. BMS Principal Michele Vance explained that her first priority would be a social worker or a special education case manager. CMS Assistant Principal Carol McCarthy described the need for a full-time school psychologist.

In response to a question about the philosophy and approach of the special education department regarding the types of positions hired, how resources were delegated and whether the goal was to be more centralized or local to each school, Superintendent Bass said he had examined existing resources and how current staff could be moved around, but that the larger part of the solution was to see how additional resources could address these issues in a systemic approach, keeping in mind the differing needs and culture of each building. He noted an uptick in behavioral issues in the schools and that the District had an obligation to meet those needs as effectively as possible.

Mr. Croteau clarified that the District was not requesting the new special education positions to fill service gaps created when the Assistant Principals were hired, that these needs existed then and still existed. Ms. Patterson asked the Principals to clarify how WWEC's staff function in their schools specifically versus District special education staff, and noted that it would be worthwhile to examine whether the WWEC contract could be reduced. Mr. Crush remarked that he did not dispute the need for the additional positions but would like to assess ways to cut back on WWEC, as he was uncomfortable with the

lack of an RFP process. Ms. Patterson suggested a nonpublic session to discuss some of these topics more in depth, given privacy issues related to a small number of students.

Ms. Cannon expressed confusion about the District's goals in hiring both internal staff and contracted services, and asked whether this represented conflicting paradigms of centralizing vs. decentralizing special education services. Superintendent Bass clarified the need to find a balance between specific in-school needs vs. a District-wide need for support. Ms. Palley echoed the need to find a balance and that it was often more cost-effective to contract services than hire District staff. Principal Scarpati explained that consultants and staff worked closely together to find solutions for student issues, that consultants were often able to offer areas of expertise not necessarily found internally, and that their additional expertise and resources were invaluable. Principal Lauze noted the value of having resources at the school level to provide direct services to students as well as the consulting resources provided by WWEC staff, including progress measurement and evaluation of services.

In response to a question whether the money spent on WWEC could be used to hire full-time District staff to provide the same services, Ms. Palley explained that the 16 WWEC positions would be considerably more expensive if hired as staff than contractors. Superintendent Bass suggested it might be helpful for the Board to have an actual analysis of the WWEC program next fall or winter, so it would be in a better position to make a decision for next year's budget, as the information presented during the current budget cycle had been more anecdotal than data-driven. Mr. Croteau supported conducting a study over the course of a year to obtain hard data. Ms. Patterson suggested this be discussed in more depth at the open session on March 23.

Mr. Crush commented that the WWEC contract was discussed every year and it was time to make a decision rather than putting it off once again. Mr. Parker added that it was important to have the necessary data at that time, as the proposed positions in next year's budget were also predicated/dependent on WWEC. Mr. Crush asked how parents could be involved with the WWEC discussion, and described two takeaways from the evening's discussion: a need for additional discussion of the WWEC contract and determining parent involvement. Superintendent Bass suggested the Board meet with building Principals and prepare data analysis of services provided by WWEC staff in each building, and what might happen if those services were suddenly pulled out.

Mr. Richards noted that the WWEC contract fell under the professional services section of the budget and that, while special education enrollment was dropping at a faster rate than regular enrollment, the budget increase did not reflect that decrease. He stated that the District could lose as much as \$800,00–900,000 if state aid was not renewed, and if the proposed new positions were in the budget, the District would have to pay for them without the additional state aid. Ms. Higgins suggested current elementary teachers could obtain special education certifications. Principal Lauze emphasized that, regardless of enrollment numbers, student needs were intensifying, and the expressed need for additional support was coming directly from teachers, not just from administration.

Superintendent Bass and Mr. Dunn agreed to present specifics on budget reductions at the next work session on March 12. Superintendent Bass explained that he had been in contact with the building Principals over the weekend, and that all were helping to find areas to trim in their budgets.

Ms. Patterson reminded the public that the budget had been posted on the District website along with Board member contact information, and encouraged community members to attend the public hearings on March 16 and March 19.

Mr. Croteau noted that the Superintendent screening committee had met and was in the process of reviewing candidate applications. He said the committee would meet again on March 10, and that the process was moving forward smoothly and on schedule.

Ms. Patterson opened the meeting for public comment.

Concord resident and parent Adrian Evans noted that she had a special education student in the District, and was the co-chair of the NH Council on Autism Spectrum Disorders. She said that when the WWEC contract was initially put in place 12 years ago, it was “sold” as a mechanism to train District staff to eventually take over, which had not happened. She said the contract had gotten bigger annually. She noted that she had heard from staff and parents that student behaviors were a problem, and that increasing the contract did not seem to be “cutting it.” She expressed concerns about WWEC staff credentials. She said that there was no RFP (request for proposal) two years ago; that it was instead an RFB (request for bid), which specifically outlined positions that did not entail legally-required certifications. She said she was concerned with how the process had been conducted and said that other providers in the area did exist. She said it would be beneficial to hire in-house staff and that funds could be spent more wisely on behavioral analysts in each school, rather than consultants. She felt the process had been shielded and inaccessible, and had concerns over the size of the WWEC contract and the fact that it always seemed to be “pushed through” with minimal examination.

Concord resident and parent Sarah Aiken noted that she had a special education student in the District, that she was the Governor’s appointee on the NH Council on Autism Spectrum Disorders, and a trained and certified special education advocate. She disclosed that she was Mr. Croteau’s daughter. She expressed concerns with her own child’s special education experience in the District, describing inadequate contact with District staff and concerns that her son’s IEP had not been followed and that he had not been receiving services outlined in his IEP. She explained that she had been unable to get a response from the administration and was frustrated with the lack of contact and communication. She added that in her role on the Autism Council, she had worked with special education families from Concord and that her situation was not unique. She made three recommendations to the Board: provide an opportunity on a regular basis, without administrators present, for staff, students and parents to share their experiences with Board members; restore 10 special education assistant positions; and perform a time study of the Assistant Principals to determine why, as stated at the February 17 meeting, 80% of their time was spent managing student behaviors and why this was not done by WWEC staff. She added that she only felt safe voicing these concerns because her son was

graduating in June. She emphasized that she was concerned by the special education program and felt it was not working.

**The Board voted 9-0 to adjourn (moved by Ms. Higgins, seconded by Mr. Crush).**

The meeting adjourned at 7:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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