

NASHOBA REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
Budget Workshop

February 25, 2010

SCHOOL COMMITTEE IN ATTENDANCE: Brian Burke, Monica CampoBasso, Nancy Federspiel, George Babich, Mel Govindan, Maureen Busch, Richard Fly and Lynn Colletti

ADMINISTRATION IN ATTENDANCE: Michael Wood, Superintendent of Schools, George King, Assistant Superintendent

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Burke called the meeting to order at 6:10 PM in the School Committee Conference Room.

Mr. Burke opened the meeting by thanking everyone for attending and for those watching at home.

Mr. Wood advised the committee that Tracey Conte, Director of Special Education and Tom O'Brien, Director of Athletics are here to address questions the committee members had at the last meeting.

Mr. Wood stated that the revenues are becoming a little clearer, what we are hearing almost unanimously on the legislative side is there is going to be a cut somewhere in that 3%-5% range, that we budgeted, in local aid, chapter 70 and most likely regional transportation. With that our budget is still intact and we would not have to make any changes to adjust for that so we will be in very good shape.

Mr. Burke asked if 5% was tested and proved, he has spoken to a member of a school committee in another district which stated they are budgeting for 10% reduction in revenue from the state. Mr. Wood replied he was at a MARS meeting where the range of 5-10% was mentioned, but the representatives have been talking more of the 3-5% and feeling pretty good about that range.

Mr. Burke asked the members if they would like to see a 10% budget along with the 5% budget.

The committee discussed whether a contingency plan with a 10% decrease in state funding be developed. The general consensus was there is no need for a contingency plan, but that the public should be made aware that the budget voted on is based on the expected 5% decrease and if the decrease comes back higher than expected our budget will be adjusted accordingly.

Mr. Wood introduced Tracey Conte. Ms. Conte explained she does have a plan of how the district is going to accommodate student's needs with the reduction of six paraprofessionals. Mr. Conte stated she does feel confident that all needs will be met, but schedules will need to be reviewed to ensure we are as efficient as possible. Ms. Conte stated she hopes this reduction can be done without the need to terminate employees.

Mr. Burke stated that he would like the members of the school committee to know that Ms. Conte works for the School Committee, not the Superintendent, that being said, I am sure you are going to give us your complete and unvarnished opinion of the special education needs of the district.

Mr. Govindan stated that he requested Ms. Conte to attend tonight because he wanted to be assured that services would not be affected by the reductions and would not be in support of this if students needs will be affected. Ms. Conte replied that she understands and stated she would also not be in support if it affected students.

Ms. Federspiel wanted to remind the committee that it was stressed by teachers at the staff feedback meeting that aides not be reduced and asked Ms. Conte how this was going to affect the teachers. Ms. Conte replied, they will feel a small difference the reduction of 6 out of 77 is not a huge number but it is a difference, there will absolutely be support for every student's IEP needs, but it does perhaps mean there might not be an aid for assistance if other tasks, our main concern will be that the reduction does not affect students needs. The principals are very much aware of this and onboard, I have met with each one and discussed how this will be managed.

Ms. Federspiel stated that we may be increasing the number of school choice students, would this mean we are moving in the wrong direction, reducing aides if we are adding more school choice students? Ms. Conte replied that if the special education population increases and the overall needs increase, then we will need to address that, in the past we have not seen the school choice population to be any more needy than our typical population

Ms. CampoBasso stated she heard in the presentation that some duties may have to be picked up by the teachers, can you tell me what duties these may be. Ms. Conte replied I think we would be referring to the normal duties, such as lunch, recess, bus duty, those sort of things that may now be completed by aides. Ms. CampoBasso stated she would like to state that elementary school teachers have the least amount of prep time and to add these tasks on concerns her.

Mr. Babich asked how the number of students would be moving into the district is anticipated and are the numbers of students being diagnosed with special needs remaining steady or rising? Ms. Conte replied that the numbers in the district have been pretty steady for quite some time.

Mr. Govindan asked who picks up the costs for special education students who come into the District by School Choice? Mr. Wood replied that there is a formula for special education students and we do receive more from the resident town for special education students than a school choice student not requiring these services.

Mr. Burke stated he agrees with what has been said with the need for aides in classrooms and stated he is concerned that these cuts will come from Lancaster, the town in most need. Mr. Wood replied that is not necessarily correct. Ms. Conte explained that the present plan is parity in the district, evenly distributed, with this new plan it would student needs based, so therefore the town with the most need would have the most aides.

Mr. Fly asked if these six positions are currently filled and would this mean layoffs. Mr. Wood replied they are hoping most of these would be empty from attrition and employees leaving the district on their own. Mr. Fly asked what the salary differences are in aides and teachers. Mr. Wood replied it is 2/1.

Mr. Wood introduced Tom O'Brien and advised he is here to address any questions or concerns regarding the athletic department and fees in the district.

Mr. O'Brien stated this year is the first year that no new activities have been added in five years. Mr. O'Brien stated that everything is level funded and the only thing in the budget is transportation, one reason for this increase is the Stow project will affect the baseball season next year with the added expense of busing of \$2500 which may also affect the softball team.

Mr. Govindan asked how the intramural sports are going, and why there is a request for a 10% increase. Mr. O'Brien stated that there are eight programs at the high school and they are going well, the budget amount is for the stipends increase only.

Mr. O'Brien addressed the Bolton citizen's questions regarding adding programs and the process of how this is done, stating that are a number of factors that need to be considered, first is that the interest is there and that it is sustainable, which is the hardest thing to determine. The second part is that if the district has resources to support it. As far as self funded programs, there is a number of issues, such as title IX, which requires that all programs are treated equally.

Mr. Federspiel asked about user fees, and how they are determined for each sport. Mr. O'Brien advised that the fees are \$150 per sport with no family cap and there is an additional charge for hockey and skiing to cover rink time and ski passes.

Mr. Govindan asked if a family could not afford the additional fee do we have a provision to help the family with this. Mr. O'Brien replied that they would have to qualify for free/reduced lunch to qualify for fee assistance.

Mr. Burke asked if anyone on the committee feels they would like to revisit the user fees. Ms. CampoBasso and Mr. Fly stated that this is not the time to asked families to pay more.

Committee questions on budget:

Mr. Govindan asked what the 504 compliance lines in the budget are for? Mr. Wood replied, that it is to provide access to students who have a disability but do not require special education but do meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. When someone qualifies the section 504 plan provides access to education in some cases and it is similar to special education. An example may be when a student who is ill and can not attend school, this would cover the tutor.

Mr. Govindan asked about the Worcester County Retirement line in the budget. Mr. King responded that it is a reflection of their poor performance in the stock market. It is our assessment and it is required to be paid off in full by 2028 but there is some talk about it being extended further to 2040. All non union employees who retire have to be part of Worcester Country Retirement.

Mr. Govindan questioned the reduction of \$88000 in teaching and learning, and asked if this was because we are not filling the Director position? Mr. Wood replied that is correct.

Mr. Govindan questioned the increase in professional development (PD) request. Mr. Wood replied the biggest increase is in the designing of our social competency program district wide so that we are working on training our teachers for responsive classroom. Mr. Wood explained we have 3 full days of professional development and summer academy.

Mr. Burke asked if we are using "home grown" talent on PD days instead of paying outside speakers. Mr. Wood replied yes we do use our own staff and that the majority of sessions being run on March 5th were being done so by our staff members.

Ms. CampoBasso asked about the clerical sub salaries, stating she thought this was eliminated last year. Mr. Wood replied it was not eliminated but reduced and we are using our central office support to cover the schools as much as possible. Ms. CampoBasso stated she would like to repeat her concerns about taking the Hale principal position line out of the budget for fear not being able to justify getting it back.

Ms. Federspiel stated that she is also not comfortable with removing the Hale principal position and questioned the interview process and timeline. She added that she is not comfortable with the way this process was handled and feels it will be hard to justify one of the two positions in the future. Mr. Wood responded to the question on process and stated that it worked exactly has it was intended to work. That was not the outcome anyone was expecting but it was the search committee that made the inquiry to have him explore the possibility of Mr. King continuing for another year. The committee discussed the time line for searching and hiring for the Principal position.

Mr. Wood advised that with every budget we set priorities, we would set the priority that the funding for a principal at Hale would in fact be top, even if it meant reorganizing some other department in either central office or elsewhere, ideally in 2012 we will be dealing with some additional revenue. Mr. Wood stated that he does not have any concern regarding the ability to fund a principal position.

Mr. Govindan stated that we need to make the public aware the decisions we have made, such as not filling the Principal position at Hale, to keep this budget down but that does not mean in the future we will continue to have Mr. King doing two jobs.

Ms. CampoBasso stated she wanted to go back to when Ms. Conte was hired, that director position was vacant for two years and she felt the committee had hard time justifying that. Mr. Wood replied that particular circumstances was in light of training for Ms. Conte, whom he saw as the mostly likely candidate to succeed. The arrangement allowed Ms. Conte to get her license, which took a year longer than expected. This circumstance is different too in that just the nature of the training that Mr. King is getting, this is huge bonus for when Mr. King returns to his Assistant Superintendent position, he will be much more knowledgeable to assist with the education side of his role and not just the financial.

Ms. CampoBasso questioned the 4% increase toward administrative salaries. Mr. Wood replied some would be at 4%, some less. Ms. CampoBasso questioned the rationale behind such a large increase given the current economy. Despite the fact that administrators took no raise last year, Ms. CampoBasso would like to look again at this cost.

Ms. CampoBasso stated we owe it to three people (new members of the Committee) to examine how we are going forward, going through the executive summary group by group.

Mr. King reviewed and explained each line of the Salary Non Salary sheet explaining it in place of the executive summary of the budget.

CITIZENS' COMMENTS

NONE

EXECUTIVE SESSION

School Committee went into Executive Session at 8:10 pm for the purpose of reviewing possible litigation with our attorney.

MOTION

Brian Burke made a motion to enter into Executive Session at 8:10 pm for the purpose of negotiation strategy to include Michael Wood, George King, and Aleta Masterson with no business to be conducted after; seconded by Monica CampoBasso **IN FAVOR:** Brian Burke, Nancy Federspiel, George Babich, Richard Fly, Lynn Colletti, Mel Govindan, Monica CampoBasso and Maureen Busch **VOTED AND PASSED UNANIMOUS (8-0-0)**

MOTION

Brian Burke made a motion to reconvene to open session at 8:45 pm; seconded by Monica CampoBasso **IN FAVOR:** Brian Burke, Nancy Federspiel, George Babich, Richard Fly, Lynn Colletti, Mel Govindan, Maureen Busch and Monica CampoBasso **VOTED AND PASSED UNANIMOUS (8-0-0)**

MOTION

Brian Burke made a motion to adjourn at 8:45 pm seconded by Monica CampoBasso **IN FAVOR:** Brian Burke, Nancy Federspiel, George Babich, Richard Fly, Lynn Colletti, Mel Govindan, Maureen Busch and Monica CampoBasso **VOTED AND PASSED UNANIMOUS (8-0-0)**

The meeting adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Aleta Masterson
Executive Assistant

