

GROTON-DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE

High School Library
Business Meeting Minutes
February 25, 2009
(Approved 3/18/09)

PRESENT:

Mr. Peter Carson
Ms Berta Erickson
Mr. Jim Frey
Dr. Paul Funch, Chair
Mr. Chuck McKinney, Vice-Chair
Mr. Frank O'Connell
Mr. Jon Sjoberg, Secretary

ADMINISTRATION:

Dr. Alan Genovese, Superintendent
Timothy Sheehan, Director of Business and Finance
Dr. Susan Rubel, Director of Curriculum/Staff Development

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES:

Brittany Bowes and Erin Christman

STAFF, PRESS, OTHERS: C. Beckert-Long, Groton Herald; P. Comtois, Groton Landmark; P. Myerson, S. Silverman, S. Marcus-Cohen, D. Twomey, N. Keegan, See attached sign-in sheet

CALL TO ORDER:

The GDRSC Meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m. and the Committee voted to adjourn to executive session under M.G.L. Chapter 39, Section 23B-3. The meeting reconvened in open session at 7:10 p.m., with no plans to return to executive session, and was called to order by the chair, P. Funch

ANNOUNCEMENTS/SPOTLIGHT

Update on Upcoming School Events

D. Twomey and Principal Marcus-Cohen displayed the 70th Annual Clark University Tournament plaque won by the boys basketball team on February 21st. This is the fifth win in the school's history. They will be playing their final play-off game at Tantasqua on Saturday at 7:00 p.m. The girls basketball team will play Uxbridge at home on Friday night and the cheerleaders will be competing at Milford High School on Sunday. The Women in Sports award ceremony was held on February 13th and was very well attended. On Tuesday, the girls' ski team won the MIAA State Sportsmanship Award for the winter season of 2009 and D. Twomey and S. Marcus-Cohen said it was a great sports year.

District Newsletter Recognition

Dr. Genovese recognized Administrative Assistant Leslie Wickfield for the wonderful job she did putting together the district newsletter. It is on the website, has been distributed to the schools and will be available at various businesses.

Brittany Bowes and Erin Christman read prepared announcements and a copy is attached to these minutes.

B. Erickson announced she had the privilege of going to the JFK Library with the Peace Book group on Monday and said they should be very proud of the students.

PRESENTATIONS/DISCUSSION

Review of Upcoming School Committee Agenda Calendar

Dr. Funch reviewed the upcoming school committee agenda items and the following liaisons were assigned to

coordinate any questions:

April 1st - Curriculum Update (Social Studies) - B. Erickson
PTYC Report - C. McKinney

April 15th - Elementary and ECC SIP's - J. Frey

May 6th - PPS Report/SPEDPAC Presentation - Dr. Funch

May 20th - HS Handbook/MS Handbook/MS SIP - P. Carson

June 3rd - HS SIP/MS Turning Points/Math Programs - J. Sjoberg

Review of Budget Impact Summary Document

Dr. Genovese said the Administrative Team has been working on the fiscal restraints that have caused some serious reductions to different parts of the budget. The EQA examiner had noted the district could be proud of the academic success but the district is "on the cusp" and if they go much further, it may affect the quality of education. He reviewed the spreadsheet of the FY10 potential budget reduction list, explaining the impact and partial solutions. The cuts total \$930,800 and he stated some adjustments may be made as they go through the process but the bottom line will remain the same.

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

E. Lazuris asked how the decision was made to freeze some salaries and not others and if everyone was in agreement. Dr. Genovese said this was a discussion at Administrative Council and not everyone is always in agreement.

As the parent of a second grader at Swallow Union, N. Keegan feels the elementary schools are getting hit very hard with the reading and losing classroom teachers. She would like class sizes kept at 26 and said reading is everything as it permeates through all subjects. If possible, she would like them to keep the reading recovery program as she feels the kids will "slip through the cracks".

Dr. Genovese said they are trying not to eliminate programs as it is easier to bring them back when they are kept in place. The remaining reading specialists will be working more directly with the teachers in providing support and building their capacity to teach reading. Reading Recovery is a 20 week program that targets a limited number of students and they will have to look at other ways to provide intervention.

With the elimination of the Director of Curriculum and Staff Development position, K. Stone said she is concerned with how the curriculum is coordinated between the elementary schools. Dr. Genovese said the coordinator of curriculum would work with the school's leadership team, and himself, to be sure they are moving in the same direction. The leadership at the building level will provide the leadership to the staff. She asked if foreign language was required to be taught at a certain grade level and was told no. She asked if there are ways to temporarily reduce some electives at the high school rather than hitting the elementary level. Dr. Genovese said the discussions were focused on being "system-wide" and acknowledged there have been huge trade-offs.

Dr. Funch said this was a team effort to minimize the damage and everyone is getting less than they want. He said the revenue side of the budget has its own problems and things may change.

Dr. Genovese believes Groton is still supporting a 2.5% increase and Dunstable's assessment is a 1.32% increase. If a 2.5% reduction is made to accommodate Dunstable's request, another \$800,000 to \$900,000 needs to be cut.

PUBLIC HEARING: FY10 PRELIMINARY BUDGET

Dr. Funch convened the FY2010 Preliminary Budget Public Hearing at 8:05 p.m. (See Public Hearing Minutes of FY10 Preliminary Budget - February 25, 2008). The school committee meeting resumed at 8:50 p.m.

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS (cont)

With respect to the impact statements, J. Frey asked if the administration has a priority ranking in mind should they find some alternative means to fund things. Dr. Genovese said they are working on this. Staff that will be specifically impacted have been notified by their respective administrators.

If they should receive more federal or state aid than expected, P. Carson asked where the money would go since they cannot raise the budget once it is voted on. Dr. Genovese said they cannot raise the towns' assessments. There is the potential in the economic stimulus package for the district to receive about \$675,000 for special education but their inquiries to Washington have not been answered. The money would be targeted to be sure they are meeting the needs of the special education population.

With respect to concerns expressed about the elementary cuts, B. Erickson said if restorations were to be made, her vote would be in the elementary reading area. She feels every administrator suffered some losses and feels there was a lot of cooperation in spite of the impacts.

J. Sjoberg asked which schools go with the custodial salaries shown on page 9. T. Sheehan advised the \$127,000 figures are for Swallow Union and Florence Roche, \$292,288 is for the high school and \$323,357 is for the middle school. J. Sjoberg asked why it appears the elementary is taking the brunt of the cuts. Dr. Genovese said they look at the things that need to be in place for the high school's accreditation and they looked at the schools in the aggregate. There will be a tremendous effort to not have kids "fall through the cracks". Dr. Rubel noted enrollment is declining at the elementary level.

REPORTS FROM SUB-COMMITTEES

Policy - P. Carson reported J. Frey and B. Erickson attended the Administrative Council meeting to talk about the latest revisions to the Advertising Policy. J. Frey said PTA's/PTO's engage in the same sort of agreements with outside commercial interests in their fundraising efforts and the question came up as to whether they will be governed by the same policies. Policy KHA discusses public solicitations in the schools which says the PTA's/PTO's are school groups by definition and should be complying with the same policies as the administrators and staff. They will be discussing this at a future meeting. The GDEF has also asked how their posters will be affected.

C. McKinney asked if they will be having a policy public hearing and P. Carson said this has not been determined. J. Frey said they have to actively engage with the PTO's/PTA's. It is the consensus of the committee to hold a public forum and/or a public hearing.

Their next meeting is Tuesday, March 3rd.

Budget & Finance - C. McKinney reported they will meet on March 25th.

Communications - J. Frey reported they met with Gary Babin and the focus was on how to improve the use of the website and the solicitation and processing of public comments. Members received a copy of proposed changes to the Rules for Public Comment that are attached to the school committee's agenda and will be on the next school committee agenda. Immediate changes will be made to the way they receive public comments on the website and the person will now receive an email acknowledging receipt of their comment. Members agreed to the proposal of having their pictures put on the website along with a biography. They will be looking at adding an email link.

Think Tank - B. Erickson reported they will be meeting at 7:00 p.m. on March 5th at the MSN library.

Retirement of Facilities - C. McKinney reported he will be attending a meeting tomorrow night and hopes to have a final report for next week's meeting.

Report of the Director of Business & Finance - T. Sheehan reported he hopes to present a preliminary FY09 third quarter report to Budget and Finance at the end of March.

He will spend about three days in Buffalo to train in the automated purchasing model that comes with the KVS software. The district currently has a manual purchase order system with handwritten requisitions and requires the superintendent's or his review and signature for every requisition. The new system will allow for automatic approvals by the principals up to a certain amount.

Another initiative is installing the QuickBooks accounting program for the food service area. A point of sale system is being implemented at the elementary schools and should be running by April 1st. If successful, they will consider expanding it to the middle school and high school. This is being charged to the operating budget with encumbered FY08 funds.

Revenue/Expense Report - Football Program - T. Sheehan reviewed the revenue/expense report for the football program and stated no direct expenses came from the operating budget. The program was funded through user fees and community fundraising and a separate revolving fund was set up. The program has a balance of \$4,428.28 and he is comfortable with the way the program ran.

Report of the Chair - Dr. Funch reported he will be attending the Division One MASC meeting at the Billerica High School tomorrow night on budgeting in tough economic times and energy conservation. He will give a report at the next meeting.

Report of the Superintendent

First Draft of FY10 School Calendar (Informational) - Dr. Genovese reviewed the draft of what the FY10 school calendar might look like and noted school would start on August 31st. School would end June 25, 2010 if all five snow days were used. The Administrative Team has discussed how to make the half days more predictable and they are looking to confining them to Wednesdays and Thursdays and members agreed this is a good idea.

Given the number of snow days used this year, J. Frey asked if they should keep September 4th as an extra day and not have it off since some of the kids will only have been in school for one day. Members agreed this is a good idea. P. Carson said they could consider April vacation but Dr. Genovese said this would be a public forum.

Dr. Genovese stated they will not be having school on the two Saturdays in March provided they do not use two snow days by March 1st. School will be held on Good Friday.

Strategic Plan Update - Training was provided this week to various people to lead the internal focus groups and meetings are being scheduled.

Other - Members were given their packets for next week's meeting as well as a packet containing the school newsletters. Members were advised they may receive an electronic distribution of C. McKinney's report.

ACTION ITEMS

VOTE: Non-Consent Action Items Discussion

None

VOTE: Consent Action Items

J. FREY MOVED TO ACCEPT THE BUSINESS MEETING MINUTES OF DECEMBER 17, 2008 AND FEBRUARY 4, 2009. SECONDED BY P. CARSON

SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

In response to questions submitted by J. Sjoberg, T. Sheehan distributed copies of his response.

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ADJOURNMENT

J. FREY MOVED TO ADJOURN AT 9:38 P.M. SECONDED BY B. ERICKSON
SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

Respectfully submitted,

Susan H. Smith
Recording Secretary

With attachments

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Brittany Bowes and Erin Christman (left at 8:30 p.m.)

STAFF, PRESS, OTHERS: C. Beckert-Long, Groton Herald; P. Comtois, Groton Landmark; P. Myerson, S. Silverman, S. Marcus-Cohen, D. Twomey, N. Keegan, See attached sign-in sheet

Chairman P. Funch convened the FY10 Preliminary Budget Public Hearing at 8:05 p.m.

T. Sheehan recognized the contributions of the business office staff to the budget process and Karen Roensch, who has been instrumental in the presentation of the budget. Version 2 of the budget was distributed and the changes were reviewed. They have identified \$204,000 in previously unidentified cuts and they have combined cuts from rounds 1 and 2 into a consolidated list of reductions totaling \$930,800. A section describing in more detail the changes to the minimum towns' assessments has been added to the superintendent's narrative and summary .

He explained this budget is being presented in a function code format specified by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). The format employs four digit function codes to aggregate and collect data and makes it easy to see where the money goes at the macro level. The account structure has also been simplified. He stated they are well aware of the economic climate with the recession and unparalleled declines in state revenues. The towns depend on local revenues and these are declining due to the housing slump and reduced consumer spending. The budget assumptions were reviewed and include a projected enrollment decrease of 54 students, targeted reductions of 5% to 10% for district-wide expenses and a 10% decrease in school site operating budgets allocated to principals, in addition to a 2-3% decrease based on enrollment. Non-school departments (curriculum, maintenance, system-wide) were asked to target reductions of 5% to 10% wherever possible. No new programs or initiatives were built into the budget.

Formerly known as a level service or roll forward budget, T. Sheehan said a maintenance budget was built identifying contractual salary increases and non-discretionary changes. The maintenance budget is \$32,476,345, a \$1,108,784 increase over FY09, and is driven almost entirely by salaries.

The debt service is going down but reimbursements from MSBA are also going down so the debt assessments for the towns actually increase. The expense side of the budget is only up \$97,693, less than 0.8% over FY09.

About \$588,694 in expense increases are mostly non-discretionary and many involve Sped expenses for

collaborative tuitions, transportation and private school placements. These expenses were offset by \$491,291 in expense decreases in big ticket items that are normally budget drivers. These include reducing the cost of the regular transportation budget by negotiating with the bus company and moving the health insurance to GIC.

The FY10 maintenance budget has a total budget increase of \$1,003,502, a decrease in revenue of \$369,065 and a decrease in MSBA reimbursement of \$436,660. The maintenance budget is short \$1,809,227 and the only sources for that money are from budget cuts, an E&D appropriation and increases in town assessments.

In order to level fund the operating budget, the Administrative Council has identified \$930,800 in cuts, \$250,000 will be taken from E&D and \$628,427 would come from new town assessments for both debt and operating assessments. The actual FY2010 operating budget is \$31,545,545, an increase of \$277,984 (0.9%) from the prior year. The debt service budget totals \$4,357,931, a decrease of \$205,282 (4.5%) for a total budget of \$35,903,476 (0.2%).

The town assessments, including debt, were reviewed and Groton's total assessment increase is \$530,170 and Dunstable's is \$98,257. There was a drastic increase in the minimum town contributions as determined by the Department of Revenue and the DESE. The state is using a new formula to distribute Chapter 70 aid and in addition to the towns' property values, it includes aggregate personal income and that shows up in higher minimum town contributions. This is an increase of 23.40% for Groton and 21.65% for Dunstable. As the minimum contribution increases, the percent of the foundation budget covered by state aid decreases. The administration predicts the district should receive close to the state-wide increase in Chapter 70 aid in FY2011.

P. Donahue asked what the three consultant line items are for and T. Sheehan said one relates to the district's move to GIC and the other two relate to special education services (speech and language support and occupational therapy).

With respect to the decrease in MSBA reimbursement, B. Erickson is under the impression the money came from a state formula and is predetermined and asked how they can promise money and then just take it away. T. Sheehan said MSBA has used several formulas for distributing aid and there is a schedule of payments. This was a planned event and they knew this was coming.

E. Lazuris asked for an explanation of the town assessments and asked if this is an override. T. Sheehan explained the budget, as presented, would require a 2.5% increase in Groton's assessment for the operating budget and the selectmen, Finance Committee and Business Manager made it clear in December they would support an increase of about \$345,000 and this became a target figure. This triggers about a \$52,000 increase for Dunstable. Initially, Dunstable's position was a 5% reduction in their total assessment, including debt. Their current position is a 3% or 2.5% reduction in their operating assessment. He noted that for every dollar decrease, they have to decrease Groton's assessment by the same factor (3 ½ to 1). The final assessment is determined by the budget the school committee chooses to adopt next week.

C. McKinney said over the past four years, they have had joint meetings with the towns' finance committees and they have developed a philosophy on how revenues would be shared. It has generally been agreed that the schools will get 60% of the "new money". Dunstable is projecting about \$140,000 in new revenue and the district is asking for an increase of \$52,000, which is lower than the traditional increase. He feels they have made a decent outreach to both towns and it does not force an override to hold this budget. The ultimate decision is made at the town meetings.

T. Sheehan noted a level funded assessment for Dunstable would require a combination of \$230,300 of additional revenue or additional cuts. A 3% decrease in Dunstable's operating assessment will require \$755,000 in new revenue or additional cuts, or some combination thereof, and their assessment would go down \$118,000 and Groton's would go down \$239,000.

A. Manugian asked how the process goes forward if the town budgets are not ready. C. McKinney explained

the process is defined by state law. The school committee votes to adopt a budget and it is sent to the treasurer who certifies Mr. Sheehan's numbers. The treasurer sends a formal assessment to the towns and the towns then have to decide whether to accept that assessment by allocating the funds in their budget and carry it forward to town meeting for approval. If the assessments are not approved, the district would not have a budget and they would need to reconvene and make decisions on how to proceed.

Dr. Genovese said town officials are obligated to put the requested budget in front of voters at town meeting and then make their recommendations. If the selectmen decide the town will only support a certain amount and voters want the full request, the town would look at an override.

A. Manugian asked if there is documentation showing the impacts and benefits from increasing salaries. T. Sheehan said the salary increases are primarily driven by collective bargaining and the only raises that are discretionary are in the administrative payroll. She understood there had been discussion to eliminate some of the teachers' raises. Dr. Genovese said this will be ongoing discussions as they work together to offset specific money amounts and bring services back through suggestions the unions may have to offer as alternatives.

The budget hearing closed at 8:50 p.m. and the committee returned to their regular business meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan H. Smith
Recording Secretary