



Town of Wilmington

Finance Committee

121 Glen Road Wilmington, 01887

Meeting Minutes Thursday, March 5, 2020

Finance Committee Chairman, John F. Doherty III, called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm in the conference room at Wilmington High School. Members present were Theresa Manganelli, Vice Chairman, Michele Kincaid, Secretary, Jonathan Dugas, Marianne Gallezzo and Bernard P. Nally. Hirak Shah arrived late. Leigh Martinson and Kevin Stokes were absent.

FY21 WILMINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS BUDGET OVERVIEW

PRESENT IN INTEREST: Dr. Glenn Brand, Superintendent of Schools; Paul Ruggiero, Assistant Superintendent of Administration and Finance; Ken Lord, Director of Technology and Digital Learning; Brian Reagan, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Staff Development; Alice Brown-LeGrand, Director of Student Support Services. School Committee members were also in attendance in the audience.

DOCUMENT: Wilmington Public Schools Superintendent's Recommended FY21 Budget

Dr. Brand presented his FY2021 Budget. Total student enrollment in the schools is 3182, Pre-K-12, with 65 out-of-district students. Staffing and programming is structured around enrollment. Extracurricular activities remain fee-free and free transportation is provided through the operating budget. There is a slight decline in enrollment, which is anticipated to continue over the next few years and is the trend in the commonwealth. Student retention post middle school has begun to level out after a few years of a slight uptick in loss to technical and private schools. Enrollment and the budget process pertaining to collective bargaining agreements was explained. There are guidelines for the number of teachers per student, which need to be considered. In pursuit of continued growth and improvement Dr. Brand announced that the district is in year one of a new three-year strategic plan that focuses on four objectives: student learning, social & emotional learning, culture of inclusion and learning environments.

Student support services is a continuing challenge. This area covers mental health, social and emotional counselling, English language learning, behavioral health needs, special education coordination, sexual violence, suicide attempts and medication use (currently higher in Wilmington than in surrounding towns). These services require an expanded level of skills and knowledge among staff. Over the last number of years there has been a focus on attempts to build upon in-district programming to better serve students and retain in-district enrollment. Dr. Brand showed graph comparisons of inclusion rates in Wilmington and comparable towns, reviewed program expansions and additions at all eight schools, and offered cost comparisons for in-district vs. out-of-district (OOD) student support services. Transportation costs are required to be covered by the school district for OOD students when programs are not available to them in district.

Personnel changes proposed for FY2021 result in an increase from 478.35 Full Time Equivalents (FTEs) in FY2020 to 489.60 FTEs in FY2021. Dr. Brand presented a breakdown of the changes by department. Recommendations from the Walker report were taken into consideration, as well as analysis of the specific needs of students that are on IEPs. One clerical support for student support services position (0.6 FTE) was previously funded through a grant that has now "fallen off" and would require being funded through the budget going forward. Salary changes have an increase of 4.9%. Non-salary changes have an increase of 1.91%. The total recommended Budget has a 4.25% increase.

Capital requests were presented for FY2021-FY2025. Total capital requests for FY2021 are \$831,000. \$200,000 of this is proposed for a more in-depth analysis of the school facility and building planning study that resulted from the Facility Master Plan recommendation to consolidate several schools. Dr. Brand is expecting this analysis to provide an exact transition plan of how to implement the consolidation, step by step. Also included in capital requests, among other items, are the replacement of laptops and a minivan.

Ms. Manganelli asked about more precise average class sizes in the middle and high schools. Dr. Brand stated that he could get exact numbers based on core course data for the middle school and that the high school would be more complicated. Ms. Manganelli clarified her interest lies in concern about the decline in enrollment and the financial feasibility of smaller class sizes. Dr. Brand noted that the breadth of courses needs to be considered and that staffing would be adjusted if it is found to be necessary. Ms. Manganelli requested that Dr. Brand supply the committee with the numbers.

Ms. Gallezzo asked what operational changes the Superintendent is considering to encompass some of the recommendations of the Walker report. He noted that they are looking at the Instructional Support Team and adding a team chairperson to bring the total to five. Ms. Brown-LeGrand spoke about the importance of having an administrator in place to oversee special education (a coordinator position), and the need for consistency in the same roles having the same responsibilities across all schools. Ms. Gallezzo also asked about the reporting structure. Ms. Brown-LeGrand answered that all special education teachers will always report to principals, but that not all principals are comfortable evaluating special skills and that is why student support services give input.

There was a brief discussion about the gaps in partial inclusions and sub-separate settings, and the rules about staffing and the adjustments that would be needed if the ratio is changed from a new student coming in, as addressed on the Walker report. There were questions about the personnel changes and some positions that appeared to be left unfilled in the Superintendent's budget. Ms. Brown-LeGrand noted that there are many students moving to the high school that the Educational Assistants support. She also spoke about early intervention and students with profound disabilities. Dr. Brand noted that math specialists are not covered by the Walker report. He also stated that there is a variation in terms of reading and math specialists across the elementary schools and as there is not a specific model adopted it is something that needs to be attended to but is not yet decided and so is not in this budget. A plan will be ready for next year. He stated that there are no real reductions of staff and he will provide information about no-fills to the committee.

Mr. Doherty asked about the status of Union contracts. The Cafeteria Workers' contract expires at the end of FY2020, the Teachers' and Nurses' contracts expire at the end of FY 2021, and both Administrative Assistants' and Educational Assistants' contracts expire at the end of FY2022.

Mr. Doherty spoke about the need for the school department to take over the current Art's Council building. He also expressed his disappointment in comments that have been made about the need for a new Town Hall/School Administration building not being a priority and opined that we need to work together.

Asked about how much interaction he has with Town IT, Mr. Lord noted that there is a quite a lot of collaboration and discussion about projects and grants and although the school needs and town needs are very different, they coordinate their efforts as much as possible.

There was a question from the audience requesting clarification on the differences between the school budget increases from what was voted on last year from the Town warrant book for FTEs. Mr. Ruggiero answered that what was voted on last year reflected local appropriation for FTEs only and did not include those funded by grants, and the presentation today includes both local operating budget as well as grant FTEs. Clarification was also requested for the correlation between the increase in the budget and support positions and the decrease in student enrollment. Mr. Doherty stated that the entire budget can be downloaded from the school's website for reference. Dr. Brand stated that, all things being equal, contractual obligations alone account for much of the increase just to begin the next school year. Student demographics are changing and there is a large need for different, complex services. The increase in staff is in effort to retain students in the district thus keeping costs lower, and enrollment is down because the population is also down, but Wilmington is right on the line for class size and teacher ratio guidelines from CBA.

Ms. Manganelli asked who writes grants for the schools and if they apply for mostly Federal, State or private grants. Mr. Ruggiero answered that the school department does not have a specific grant writer, they apply for a variety of grants and stated that he recently sent a list of grants and who had applied for them to Assistant Town Manager Kerry Colburn-Dion. He stated that he would forward that list to the Finance Committee members as well. He gave a brief description of the different types of grants that are applied for and who might apply for them. Ms. Manganelli asked if having a grant writer, even part-time, would allow for more grant opportunities and Mr. Ruggiero answered that it has not been explored but could be. Ms. Gallezzo gave the example of how the grant writer at Shawsheen Tech is paid through the grants.

There was a brief discussion about funding for the JV Hockey team transportation. A new athletic director is coming in July 1, 2020 and this is one issue that will be considered with others that need attention. The goal is to remain user-fee free. The administration will compare fees in neighbor towns to the benefits of being one of very few suburban communities without fees. Ms. Kincaid remarked on the lack of consistent structure for supporting teams.

Ms. Gallezzo asked about a line item on the strategic plan under curriculum for \$75,000. Dr. Brand noted that possible uses include staff training and development and that the school committee will be involved with deciding how these funds will be used.

OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business to discuss.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The Finance Committee reviewed the Minutes from February 27, 2020. A motion was made by Ms. Gallezzo, seconded by Ms. Manganelli, and by the affirmative vote of all others it was:

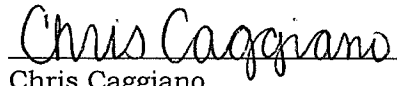
VOTED: To approve the minutes from February 27, 2020.

At the conclusion of the discussion, there being no further business to come before the Committee, a motion was made by Ms. Gallezzo, seconded by Ms. Manganelli, it was unanimously:

VOTED: That the Finance Committee adjourn.

Meeting adjourned at 8:35 pm

Respectfully Submitted,

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Chris Caggiano
Recording Secretary