

**HOLLIS BROOKLINE COOPERATIVE SCHOOL DISTRICT
BUDGET COMMITTEE
MAY 26, 2022
MEETING MINUTES**

A regular meeting of the Hollis Brookline Cooperative School District (COOP) Budget Committee was conducted on Thursday, May 26, 2022, at 6:35 p.m. at the Hollis Brookline Middle School Library.

Chairman, Darlene Mann, presided:

Members of the Budget Cmte. Present: Raul Blanche, Vice Chairman
 Matthew Maguire
 Anthony Stanizzi
 Cindy VanCoughnett, School Bd. Rep.
 Tom Whalen

Members of the Budget Cmte. Absent: David Blinn
 Brian Rater

Also in Attendance: Kelly Seeley, Business Administrator

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chairman Mann lead in the Pledge of Allegiance.

AGENDA ADJUSTMENTS - None

APPOINTMENT OF MEETING OBSERVER

Chairman Mann appointed Matthew Maguire to serve as Process Observer.

PUBLIC INPUT - None

GENERAL BUSINESS

- Food Service Review

Kelly Seeley, Business Administrator, provided a presentation (can be viewed [here](#) beginning at tape counter 7:23).

Management of the Food Service Department is directed by the Director of Student Nutrition, Amy Cassidy, The position is supervised by the Business Administrator. The salary/benefits of the position are shared by each district; COOP 45%, HSD 30%, and BSD 25%.

When fully staffed, each school has one Head Cook. The Hollis Brookline High School (HBHS) has a cook and 4 food service workers. The Hollis Brookline Middle School (HBMS) has 3 food service workers. Administrative support is provided (9 hours/week) and is split among all districts.

The Hollis Brookline school districts are part of the National School Lunch Program, which is a federally assisted meal program available to public and non-profit private schools or public and non-profit private residential childcare institutions. The primary focus is to provide nutritionally balanced lunches to children in each school day.

Benefits schools receive include cash subsidies in the form of free and reduced lunches, USDA sourced foods, and access to free training, resources and program assistance. Our lunches are required to meet Federal requirements and the districts must offer free or reduced priced lunches to eligible children.

Asked how Federal requirements have changed over the past few years, Ms. Seeley noted a change approx. 5 years ago where the districts had to provide items such as whole wheat pizzas, which students rejected. It has changed a bit over the years to return to something more flavorful for kids.

Ms. Seeley spoke of the financial components. Under the expense category falls salary, food, non-food, and equipment. Revenue is received from three sources; local (students and families paying for their meals), State (small component), and Federal (free and reduced lunch component). With regard to the fund balance, revenues in excess of expenses or expenses in excess of revenues are added to or subtracted from the food service fund balance. Each school can hold an average of 3 months' worth of operating costs in the fund balance (any excess funds must be expended on food service related items).

FY22 has come with challenges the first being supply chain issues. There is a serious lack of supply to distributors. The district has had to deal with substitutions and last minute menu changes. To minimize the lack of product, we are ordering more in advance causing storage issues. State funding has recently been provided to help.

With regard to surplus commodity foods, in the past, the district has always had USDA supplied, low-cost staples, e.g., cheese, beef, chicken, fruit. Those are not currently available. Surplus was depleted early in the year. The district has had to purchase from suppliers at a significantly higher cost.

The cost of food and paper foods has increased. The year brought multiple price increases. Some products came with a COVID surcharge. The district paid high prices for second or third choice products.

Chairman Mann questioned if a shift has been made to disposable elements, e.g., individual packaging. Ms. Seeley stated there have been attempts, but everything is on short supply and expensive. Asked if the District would move back to the way things were pre-COVID, she stated that effort will occur, but the district will continue with elements that resulted from the need to adapt and proved to be successful.

Free meals have increased participation. We already have a kitchen at the HBHS that is very challenging to move students through without increases in participation. As a result, attempts are made to get students through the lines as quickly as possible, which can impact decisions on what to serve.

FY22 improvements include no alternate meal service this year (gym was used last year). Students went through the lunch line as they did in pre-COVID days.

In terms of staffing, both schools have been short-staffed since the start of the year. Substitutes are used regularly, if available. The result has been a very dedicated staff that is overworked, tired and underpaid. Vice Chairman Blanche questioned if full staffing levels are met with the help of substitutes and was told it varies.

Addressing the effects of free meals, Ms. Seeley noted back in FY19, the COOP district was providing 3,382 breakfasts and 67,473 lunches. In FY22 (through March), the number of breakfasts was 24,253 and lunches 79,301.

Vice Chairman Blanche questioned if the later start time meant there was additional time for students to take advantage of breakfast. Ms. Seeley responded that may be; however, she believes the increase was related more to it being free. The big question is how many of those students will continue once it is no longer free.

A spreadsheet of the revenue and expense analysis was displayed. The reimbursable amount has gone from \$44,405 in FY19 to \$512,823 in FY22. Expenses have also increased. With regard to the fund balance, in FY21, the district only added \$658 to the fund and in FY22 the expectation is \$186,258. Asked, she explained although the result of free lunches has increased Federal revenue, the local revenue number decreases. The only local revenue being generated is from a' la carte sales as those are not reimbursable. A' la carte sales were not available last year.

In FY19, the Administrative Review, which is conducted every 3 years, resulted in no findings and the reviewer was very impressed with the program. In FY21 there was a State COVID-19 review that resulted in no findings; excellent comments on compliance. In FY22, the health inspectors continued to pass with praise.

The district continues to utilize Twitter to increase interest from adults and students. A' la carte is back. We are offering main meals, salads, sandwiches, parfaits, smoothies and pizza. They are working to create menus to match "real world" choices. Recipes are standardized across all districts.

In FY23, free meals for all students end 6-30-22; participation will decrease. Another challenge is that in order to be eligible for free and reduced, families have to complete the paperwork. We wanted them to fill out the paperwork during the COVID years, but that was very challenging.

Chairman Mann commented on the relatively low percentage of students who qualify for free and reduced lunches, but those numbers affect the level of any type of Title I funding, Federal funding through the ESSER and ARP grants as well as Adequacy. Asked if those programs adjusted during the period of free lunches, Chairman Mann stated there were some considerations when realizing the impact, particularly last year, when they indicated they would utilize numbers from prior years as a way to smooth the impact.

Ms. Seeley spoke of the need to get to and stay fully staffed. There is the need to increase union wages in the next Collective Bargaining Agreement cycle (2 years remain on the existing contract).

We need to identify strategies to increase participation. Noted was that the district has to charge once the students come back. There is a waiver in place that states if the district was profitable on December 30, 2021, we can charge the same or lower prices that were in place pre-COVID.

Member Whalen questioned returning to pre-COVID costs while costs have increased dramatically. Ms. Seeley responded, not counting the COVID years, we were ending the years with a fund balance. There is some wiggle room. Vice Chairman Blanche suggested returning to pre-COVID pricing for a period of time so that data collection can occur, and, if necessary, raising prices. Ms. Seeley was uncertain adjusting prices mid-year would be permitted.

It is unknown if supply chain issues will continue or if USDA supplied commodities will be available.

There is the question of what to charge for lunch and breakfast understanding it will be a transition for families to go from free to paid meals, and how we cover the increased costs.

The strategies for future success include getting back to normal operations, being fully staffed, redesign the serving line at HBHS (currently in progress), equipment upgrades (currently being worked on), increased participation especially paid breakfast, increase marketing especially via social media, and create a forum for student and parent input.

Chairman Mann questioned student account balances. She suggested this timeframe could be used to work with families to rectify those. Ms. Seeley stated her belief the Director has done a lot of that work over the past few years. She will check on the status.

Asked about plans to address staffing shortages, Ms. Seeley noted the clause in the CBA that will be taken advantage of; allows the district, when positions have been unfilled for a long period of time, the ability to hire at the top step on the grid. The district will start to utilize that.

Chairman Mann questioned if there is a plan in place to utilize some of the anticipated fund balance to address needed equipment/kitchen upgrades. Ms. Seeley stated the two things being considered at this time are redesigning the serving line at the HBHS and upgrading equipment; existing giant dishwasher will be replaced with more compact one and the freed up area will be turned into a grab and go endeavor.

Asked if the district is required to utilize specific suppliers, Ms. Seeley explained you can acquire supplies locally. You are not required to utilize certain vendors but do have to go through a procurement process to obtain the food. The district is part of a buying group, which helps keep costs down.

Asked how to go about increasing salaries during the current contract, Ms. Seeley explained the only mechanism for doing that is through a sidebar agreement.

- School Board Update

Member VanCoughnett spoke of the presentations provided during the last meeting. Assistant Superintendent Bergskaug provided a presentation on curriculum and Principal Girzone provided a presentation on class sizes. It was the first time the Board received a preliminary update (when students register). The Board will be updated (October) after the class schedules are completed and will be able to compare the anticipated versus actual class sizes.

Superintendent Corey discussed the dirt/parking lot. Discussions have been ongoing on the first stage of the lot, which consists of grading and adding gravel. The only big concern expressed was with regard to runoff.

Chairman Mann questioned if retirements are being seen and was told there are a number of retirements (4 or 5).

Vice Chairman Blanche questioned the Unassigned Fund Balance. Ms. Seeley stated her belief it remains relatively unchanged (\$400,000 - \$500,000 range).

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

COOP Budget Committee [January 27, 2022](#)

The following amendments were offered:

- Page 3, Line 16; replace "provide" with "provided"
- Page 3, Line 48; remove the extra space following "There are"
- Page 4, Line 11; insert "Deurloo" before "Babcock"
- Page 4, Line 19; replace "he" with "the"
- Page 4, Line 50 and Page 5, Line 28; replace "Chairman" with "Chair"

**MOTION BY MEMBER BLANCHE TO ACCEPT, AS AMENDED
MOTION SECONDED BY MEMBER WHALEN
MOTION CARRIED
6-0-0**

COOP Budget Committee [April 21, 2022](#)

The following amendments were offered:

- Page 4, Line 48; correct the spelling of “of”
- Page 5, Line 30; delete the extra space following “received”

MOTION BY MEMBER BLANCHE TO ACCEPT, AS AMENDED
MOTION SECONDED BY MEMBER STANIZZI
MOTION CARRIED

5-0-1
Member VanCoughnett Abstained

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The next meetings are scheduled for June 23, 2022 and August 25, 2022.

AGENDA BUILDING

The hope is to have a legislative update for the June meeting. It may be that the Business Administrator has recommendations for encumbrances at year end.

Chairman Mann noted a copy of the audit was shared with the Board and will be included on the August agenda.

PROCESS OBSERVER READOUT

Member Maguire stated the meeting ran efficiently and included a good update on the Food Service Program.

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION BY MEMBER BLANCHE TO ADJOURN
MOTION SECONDED BY MEMBER VANCOUGHNETT
MOTION CARRIED

6-0-0

The May 26, 2022, meeting of the COOP Budget Committee adjourned at 7:24 p.m.

Date: _____

Signed: _____