

**OLD ROCHESTER REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE
SPECIAL MEETING
February 17, 2021 at 6:30 p.m.
Marion – Mattapoissett – Rochester, Massachusetts
REGULAR MINUTES
MEETING HELD REMOTELY THROUGH ZOOM**

Members Present: Cary Humphrey, Chairperson, Heather Burke, Vice-Chairperson, Joseph Pires, Margaret McSweeney, Frances Kearns, James Muse, Suzanne Tseki.

Members Absent: Tina Rood and Michelle Smith

Others Present: Michael S. Nelson, Superintendent of Schools, Diana Russo, Administrative Assistant to the Superintendent, Michael Devoll, Principal, ORR High School, Silas Coellner, Principal, ORR Jr. High School

Meeting was called to order at 6:33 p.m. by Chairperson Humphrey.

V. General

A. School Health Unit Application Approval

Mr. Nelson reported that each year the school committee must approve the School Medication Administration Application to submit to the Department of Public Health. This application allows for our two school nurses to train administrative staff and teaching staff to administer medication to students as appropriate and needed on school grounds and on field trips or during extra-curricular events. The application that was provided to the school committee has been reviewed and endorsed by Nicole Sadeck one of our school nurses, Dr. Reynolds - one of our school physicians, and me. At this point I am looking for a motion – to authorize the school nurses to delegate the administration of medication to other school personnel as presented in the School Health Unit Application.

Motion to approve the School Health Unit Application as presented

MOTION by Ms. Burke

MOTION Seconded by Ms. Tseki

ROLL CALL

7:0 (Humphrey; yes, Burke; yes, Pires; yes, McSweeney; yes, Kearns; yes, Muse; yes, Tseki: yes)

B. School Choice Discussion

Mr. Nelson reported that by June 1st each year – the school committee must deliberate on and take action regarding their position on school choice for the upcoming school year. As many – if not all of you are aware – Old Rochester has historically offered school choice opportunities for students. Tonight, I am asking that the school committee have a discussion regarding school choice for the 2021-2022 school year. To provide some background information – last year the school committee acknowledged that there were 83 returning school choice students attending ORR this school year. The school committee approved the addition of 20 new school choice students (with the following parameters: up to 11 in 7th grade, up to 3 in 8th grade, and up to 11 in 9th grade). At the end of this school year – we anticipate 24 students graduating or exiting from ORR. Therefore, at time the administration is recommending that the school committee consider approving up to 27 new school choice slots for the 2021-2022 school year. This would maintain our current numbers at no more than 103 school choice students in the district. On March 24th a formal public hearing will be held to further discuss and to take action on this topic. Again, tonight no formal action is needed, instead a

formal discussion around the administrator's recommendations. At this point, I would ask Silas Coellner and then Mike Devoll to speak to their viewpoints on this topic.

Mr. Coellner reported that historically at the Jr. High School they have been declining in the school choice students, in 18-19 they had 26, in 19-20 they had 17 and this year we have 14 students, Mr. Coellner reported that our enrollment numbers are also declining, he expressed that he looks at as trying to find a balance and he feels that he could accommodate 15 7th graders next year at the Jr. High School and possibly 3 additional 8th graders.

Mr. Devoll expressed that his stance is the high school is open for business, he expressed that currently our enrollment is going down, he reported that 24 school choice seniors are exiting and they love to welcome more school choice students to replace those students. He expressed that our largest classes are this year's senior class at 190, and the junior class which is about 199 and after that the classes go down to the 150's 160's.

Mr. Nelson asked for feedback from the school committee prior to the school choice hearing on March 24, 2021.

Ms. Kearns asked why the difference in the number of students graduating and the new number of slots for next year, she expressed this is her first time going through this process and she just wants to understand it. Mr. Nelson expressed that last year the school committee had voted to go up to 103 students and 3 slots were not filled, so we are just looking to maintain the 103 cap.

Ms. Burke expressed that this question is one that a small portion of her constituents would like her to ask. She asked "if we are seeing decline in enrollment would another tactic be to not have school choice and just reduce the size of our population?" "is this feasible, or would it not be advisable?". Mr. Nelson expressed that we as administrators do acknowledge the enrollment decline, however this year brings with it some additional complexities due to the COVID 19 pandemic, it's hard to know which students will be returning and which ones will not, Mr. Nelson expressed that next year those conversations will have to intensify and those questions will be part of that conversation.

Mr. Devoll agreed with Mr. Nelson, he expressed he believes they are a year away about having those hard conversations about school choice and enrollment trends, he expressed that ORR High School is healthy north of 700 students and we have the potential to dip below that in the coming years.

Ms. McSweeney expressed she is pro school choice, but is also thinking of her constituents and knows some feel differently. She asked administration to talk a little more about the amount we receive for a school choice student and the cost of educating a resident student.

Mr. Nelson reported that DESE reimburses the district \$5,000 per each school choice student and also reimburses for additional services if a student receives special education needs. Mr. Nelson expressed that there would be ramifications if the school committee decided not to continue to offer school choice, Mr. Nelson explained that currently our budget is offset by that revenue. Mr. Nelson reported that currently our budget is offset by \$535,000, Mr. Nelson expressed that if we decided to go in a different direction the budget sub-committee would have to come back together and discuss a plan of moving forward without that revenue.

Ms. Burke explained that currently the resident student reimbursement is about \$14,000 and the school choice is \$5,000 so when you compare the two it doesn't really make sense, it makes it look like we are losing \$10,000 per student, however that is not the case, because we are not increasing capacity, we are not increasing cost to bring in the school choice students. Ms. Burke explained that

this is incremental revenue in most cases, we are not hiring extra teachers, or building extra facilities to educate these children, we are actually filling seats that would otherwise be empty. She expressed that if we didn't have the incremental revenue we would have to cut down on the opportunities offered in our schools. Ms. Burke stated that these students are treasured for their contributions to the schools in various forms, in class discussions, in theater, on the athletic fields, etc. she feels like these students bring a different perspective to ORR and in turn enrich our schools.

Mr. Humphrey asked if Mr. Coellner knew how many 8th graders would be going to private or vocational schools. Mr. Coellner stated that they are currently going through the applications process for the vocational schools, however he stated that on average its about 60 students a year. Mr. Devoll stated that he's been following this data for 13 years and about 77 to 79% of 8th graders come to ORR High School.

Ms. Burke expressed that she does prefer for school choice students to come at the 7th and 9th grade, they learn to go to our schools, they fit in right away, it just seems like the best way to build strong community is to welcome them at the very beginning.

Mr. Nelson agreed with Ms. Burke's sentiment, he explained that sometimes additional slots are added to accommodate siblings who were not selected the previous year.

Ms. Burke also cautioned that while there might be decline in enrollment there is also a lot of dense housing developments going up in the tri-town area and therefore we might see a slight enrollment increase in the future, just something to keep in mind.

C. FY22 Draft Budget Discussion

Mr. Nelson reported that tonight we felt it was important for the school committee as a whole to discuss the FY22 budget process and the current FY22 draft budget. The subcommittee has met numerous times in recent months to collaborate on the FY22 budget process. As a subcommittee we have discussed what we know of the financial landscape both at the local level and the state level, assessed our needs, and discussed our stakeholder priorities as a subcommittee. Tonight, Mr. Barber will provide a general overview of the draft FY22 budget. Our subcommittee discussed at length our current needs and future needs as we see them today at Old Rochester. With that being said, it important to note that this draft budget does not include all of the resources we originally identified or see in our schools' futures. However, based on all of the known factors, the draft budget you will hear about tonight represents what we feel as a subcommittee is a responsible FY22 draft budget and a budget that meets are educational needs at this time.

Mr. Barber presented the FY22 Draft Budget Presentation (please see attachment A).

Mr. Barber also presented an FY22 Budget in summary format as follows:

ORR JR. HIGH SCHOOL	\$4,468,996
ORR HIGH SCHOOL	\$6,803,014
ATHLETIC DEPT.	\$ 352,908
CENTRAL OFFICE	\$5,450,601
FACILITIES	\$1,597,692
STUDENT SERVICES	\$ 388,630
TECHNOLOGY	\$ 395,317
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 797,000

For a total budget of \$20,261,158 which is an increase of 2.837% over FY21.

Ms. Burke expressed that it was an excellent presentation, it really captures the outcomes and the process of the committee. She expressed that our towns should be very thankful that we are coming forward with such a reasonable budget request, she expressed that she doesn't think this budget meets all of the needs of our district but it moves our district forward in the key places and maintains our districts excellence to go forward.

Ms. Burke expressed that she is very disappointed with the figures that the state and DESE has been putting out, she expressed it is phenomenally frustrating given what the school districts have been communicating to the state over the past 5 to 10 years. She reported that in 2019 the State Auditor published a scathing report looking at regional district transportation, because when we entered the regional agreement we were promised 100% reimbursement on transportation and it has never reached that point, she expressed that after years of grassroots efforts we finally got a concession from the state that promised at least an 80% reimbursement rate and now they are not fulfilling that either so that is very frustrating, furthermore it was just last year that state legislator and the governor recognized that education reimbursements have not been keeping pace with the cost of education, Ms. Burke encourage that for anyone who wants to understand that better what that gap causes our district they should read the analysis done by UMass Dartmouth of the Old Rochester Regional School District. She expressed this was done by UMass Dartmouth to help us better understand our Regional Agreement, which explains that while the state can't keep up at the rate of increase the towns have to make up that difference, and its part of the reason we are feeling so much stress on our local budgets. She expressed that this was recognized at the state level but given the numbers that were shown here tonight it seems that they are not fulfilling that promise, Ms. Burke recognized that it's been a difficult year financially at the state level but education has been a long term need that has not been adequately addressed for at least a decade, she expressed that at some point our state has to step up if they want to maintain the form of education expected from Massachusetts schools and students.

Ms. McSweeny thanked Ms. Burke for informing the committee she expressed its important for the Towns to know that the State is underfunding education.

Ms. Kearns thanked Ms. Burke for educating her on the background of the budget she expressed it's very helpful especially to a new school committee member.

Mr. Humphrey stated that the Budget Public Hearing is scheduled for March 2, 2021 at 6:30 p.m. and it's being advertised in the local newspapers. Mr. Humphrey expressed that at the meeting we will do the presentation, questions will be answered and then the budget will be approved.

SCHOOL COUNCIL REPORT:

Mr. Gonet reported that he went to the State School Council meeting last week and they had a presentation about the FAFSA application process, they explained that currently there is a 10% decline in the FAFSA application rate, the problem being those are correlated with college attendance rates, therefore from the presentation it seems like college attendance will be on the decline due to COVID, Mr. Gonet expressed that he's not sure if that will affect ORR. Mr. Gonet expressed he will have a conversation with his guidance counselor to see if they are able to help with percentages at ORR. Mr. Gonet also reported that the State Advisory Council is looking to change the election procedures for student council positions, so that more students get involved, Mr. Gonet reported that he will keep the school committee updated as more information comes to them.

Ms. Lord reported that they met with the Regional School Council yesterday and went over the gaps in the school districts and how they can bridge those gaps through a more inclusive education system and possibly changing the curriculum, while they understand you can't change the demographics of a town they are looking at working with the assets we do have and educate other people, she

expressed that they are finishing up on that PowerPoint and she believes it's going to be really exciting and she can't wait to share that information with the committee.

Ms. Burke expressed that she doesn't believe that the FAFSA deadline has passed, therefore she encourages ORR administrators to get the word out about the application process. Mr. Gonet thanked Ms. Burke for her feedback and expressed that is exactly what they were asking to do in the presentation promoting the application and letting students know that it is still open.

Motion to adjourn at 7:34 p.m.

MOTION by Ms. Smith

MOTION Seconded by Ms. Burke

7:0 (Humphrey; yes, Burke; yes, Pires; yes, McSweeney; yes, Kearns; yes, Muse; yes, Tseki;yes)

Submitted by Diana Russo