

**ROCHESTER SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING  
BUDGET SUBCOMMITTEE MINUTES  
Rochester, Massachusetts  
March 21, 2024 at 12:00 p.m.**

*This meeting was conducted in a hybrid format. School Committee, Administrators and the public had the option of meeting in person at Superintendent's Conference Room in the Superintendent's Office, 135 Marion Road, Mattapoisett, MA 02739 or via zoom.*

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:** Sharon Hartley (in-person), Jason Chisholm (remote), Katherine Duggan (remote), Anne Fernandes (remote) and Robin Rounseville (in-person)

**ABSENT:** None

**ADMINISTRATORS:** Michael S. Nelson, Superintendent of Schools (in-person) and Howard Barber, Asst. Superintendent of Finance & Operations (in-person).

Chairperson Hartley called the meeting to order at 12:04 p.m.

**SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION:**

Superintendent Nelson welcomed everyone present and thanked them for coming together. He discussed that at the last meeting of the Budget Subcommittee with Town Officials, a level service budget was proposed at 6.33% of an increase due to fixed costs such as contractual obligations, transportation and special education obligations. He reminded the subcommittee that at this meeting, Town Officials requested the school department reduced their proposed budget by \$300,000, at either ORR or Rochester, or a combination of the two. The Town will also work on reducing their proposed budget by \$300,000 as initial projections show the Town in a deficit of about \$600,000. Superintendent Nelson again expressed his concern with potential special education services and no long-term plan, as was discussed in the previous meeting with Town Officials. The Town plans to use a special article for special education costs in the amount of about \$300,000 but this would be on-going, annual expenses for special education services and the need for a long-term plan with the Town is a concern for Superintendent Nelson.

Superintendent Nelson explained that since the last meeting, school administrators have worked to reduce the ORR budget by about \$145,000, so there is about \$155,000 for Rochester Memorial School to reduce. He requested the subcommittee come together again at this meeting to discuss what the Town is looking for, and discuss working on a Plan B.

Superintendent Nelson reviewed options to reduce in areas of literacy program support or professional development, technology and facilities but if the subcommittee wanted to reduce by \$155,000, there is no way to do it without reducing staff. Based on current enrollment and special education, it would most likely mean looking at support interventionists and specialists, not regular education or special education staff.

**School Committee Feedback:**

Ms. Duggan discussed technology reductions and maybe more opportunities for grants related to technology to supplement the reductions instead of some of the other areas to reduce where there may be fewer options for grant funding.

Ms. Fernandes discussed reviewing data related to the educational interventionists. Superintendent Nelson explained the previous building administration advocated for interventionists to support ELA and Math. Ms. Fernandes would like to review data/scores from before and after these positions were added.

Ms. Fernandes inquired about the savings since the district had six retirees last year. Mr. Barber explained the new staff is less salary, but the retirement payouts exhaust any potential savings. He added that there are no retirees this year.

Mr. Chisholm agreed that he is open to all suggestions but it does seem as though hard conversations need to take place regarding the reduction of staff.

Ms. Hartley expressed the importance of preparing students at RMS to align with Marion and Mattapoisett so that all the students are receiving the same quality of education leading into ORR. Mr. Chisholm agreed with this sentiment and did not think making reductions related to curriculum would be positive for the students.

Ms. Duggan asked if there are other ways to generate revenue such as space in the building. She would also like administration to discuss this situation with building administration and those that are in the building day in and day out. Ms. Hartley said she would also like discussions to continue with the Town.

Superintendent Nelson concluded stating it is a difficult situation for all those involved, and the Town is in a difficult situation as well. He will keep union leadership up-to-date with this conversation as well as develop recommendations with the assistance of Mr. Barber and RMS principal Ms. Letendre as the committee recommended. The subcommittee agreed to reconvene again early the following week.

Meeting was adjourned at 1:30 p.m.

Motion by Ms. Rounseville

Motion Seconded by Ms. Duggan

ROLL CALL: Hartley: yes, Chisholm: yes, Duggan: yes, Fernandes: yes and Rounseville: yes

Motion Passed 5-0

Respectfully submitted,



Michael S. Nelson  
Superintendent of Schools