



Cohasset School Committee Meeting

School Committee Minutes

Thursday, January 7, 2016
Cohasset Middle-High School
Community Use Room
143 Pond Street
Cohasset, MA

In Attendance: Jeanne Astino, Chairman
Mary McGoldrick
Ellen Maher
Katie Dugan
Barbara Stefan-arrived @ 6:41 p.m.

Also in Attendance: Barbara Cataldo, Superintendent

Call to Order and Roll Call

Chairman Astino called the meeting to order at 6:33 p.m. **Roll Call Vote; Katie Dugan-Present, Jeanne Astino-Present, Mary McGoldrick-Present, Ellen Maher-Present.**

Pledge of Allegiance-Recited

Kindergarten Discussion

Chairman Astino stated tonight's meeting was to respond to questions from Kindergarten parents regarding Kindergarten class sizes. She will respond to the questions on behalf of the School Committee and then open the floor for discussion. Chairman Astino answered the following questions;

What is the decision-making timeline for determining the number of classes and what is the threshold for determining the appropriate student-teacher ratios? Chairman Astino responded that there are several factors that are taken into consideration when determining class size. Those factors include, but are not limited to, language in the teacher contract with recommended class size. Another "tool" in determining class size in the schools accreditation by National Association for Education of Young Children, which is an organization that makes recommendations based on what they see in the district and best practices in others. A third factor that will soon come in to play as the State is working on establishing standards and parameters in this arena.

What is Cohasset's plan for maintaining or ending Kindergarten tuition? Chairman Astino stated at this time the Town is not able to move away from Kindergarten tuition and they are not sure when this may happen. Due to the size of the Town and the limited tax base, Kindergarten tuition is a reality for the foreseeable future.

In terms of the present Kindergarten cohort, the Fiscal budget for this year was based on a projected Kindergarten cohort size of 91 full time students yielding tuition funding of \$273,000; the actual enrollment for this year is 108 full time students yielding tuition income of \$312,000 resulting in tuition above what was projected and budgeted. Where has the \$39,000 gone? Chairman Astino

stated that the actual enrollment was 106 (103 f/t & 3 p/t). Some Kindergarten entry and services are required which becomes another unfunded mandate and cannot be discussed due to confidentiality.

How is the Full-Day Kindergarten Enhancement Grant spent? Chairman Astino stated the Enhancement Grant Funds have been allocated to cover the salaries of ESP's. The amount covers less than two full time salaries.

Where did the funds go for the Kindergarten half-time position? Chairman Astino stated half of all the Kindergarten teachers' salaries are funded via the regular operating budget. The other half comes from the Kindergarten revolving account. Half of the yearly salary allocation for Kindergarten teachers total \$205,000. When only three students signed up for half day Kindergarten, a plan was formulated to place those three children appropriately in the full day classrooms for part of the day. The half time salary was returned to the operating budget for teachers needed at other levels, due to needs based in increased numbers.

Given that funding was provided for a 6th Kindergarten teacher and that Kindergarten parents pay tuition they are asking that funds be made available immediately to hire, at minimum, an additional aid for this Kindergarten year and to begin immediately. Chairman Astino stated they have advertised and are interviewing candidates that will allow for an ESP in each Kindergarten classroom. They have received 12 applications, from which 8 candidates have been identified as good candidates. Five responded to the invitation for an interview; two of those five opted to remain in their current positions. Mr. LeCount has been interviewing the remaining three candidates and will have a decision soon.

The parents would like to state, for the record, that they insist that a 6th teacher be maintained for the 1st grade for the 2016/17 school year, and that ideally they would like to see the addition of a 7th teacher for the 1st grade as enrollment for next year is expected to rise. Chairman Astino stated the School Committee has discussed in the FY17 budget review and according to enrollment projections there will be 6 teachers in each grade level at the Osgood School next school year. This plan was already in place before any concerns were raised.

The parents express concerns for the future and would like the School Committee to develop a governing philosophy with a specific focus on class size. Chairman Astino assured the parents that the best interests of the children in the community are at the top of their priorities. The contract language around suggested class sizes are supported by the administration and the teachers and they are committed to the accreditation process with a well-regarded and recognized organization to make recommendations based on the best practices in this regard and many others.

Chairman Astino invited the audience to speak.

Bianca Bersani-40 Forest Avenue asked when the 6th teacher was cut what the justification was and when was the decision made. She has done her due diligence and could not find in the minutes of past meetings when the School Committee, Superintendent and Principal decided not to stick to the goal of under 20 students per Kindergarten class. Chairman Astino stated the decision was made in June.

Nathan Redmann-40 Forest Avenue asked why Cohasset doesn't strive to be better and why not try and keep class sizes at 18 or 19.

A resident (name not available) stated the Kindergarten lost a teacher and ESP support. Chairman Astino stated it was an administration decision and they are currently interviewing for more support.

Megan Whoriskey-11 Sankey Road stated she grew up and graduated from Cohasset schools and the class sizes were never this large. There needs to be a way to keep the class size numbers small. They need to put together a plan for the future. Having 23 children in a Kindergarten class is too many. Children shouldn't miss their learning opportunity. Chairman Astino reiterated the School Committee realizes how important that is. The first and foremost thing on the School Committee's minds are the children.

Nathan Redmann-40 Forest Avenue asked if the School Committee is actively looking into getting more of the pie for the schools. He asked if they have talked to the Board of Selectmen about this. The Town cannot have a static number. Chairman Astino stated the School Committee advocates every year for more money. Parents should get involved and participate in Town Meetings. The Town has a limited tax base.

Nathan Redmann-40 Forest Avenue asked if the Town can force an override. Mrs. Dugan discussed the tax levy and said the Town is not at the point of an override. Chairman Astino added that an override is a one year solution.

Amanda Zani-38 Forest Avenue stated she has noticed the decline in performance on MCAS. She distributed documentation of MCAS scores. Chairman Astino stated the School Committee has worked with the Superintendent and Principals over the years and has hired extra teachers specifically for preparing for MCAS. Mrs. Dugan added that Principal of Deer Hill Dr. deChiara is very passionate about what is best for the students. She is confident in her ability to determine class sizes and curriculum.

Amanda Zani-38 Forest Avenue added that Math and Science MCAS scores are going down.

Bianca Bersani-40 Forest Avenue asked if the School Committee is comfortable with 22 or 23 kids in a class. Chairman Astino stated if there are 2 adults in the class room she is comfortable. Superintendent Cataldo stated the discussion started in May about class sizes and the number of teachers and the decision was made in June.

Bianca Bersani-40 Forest Avenue stated the School Committee committed to keeping class size under 20 voted in June when there were 99 kids enrolled for Kindergarten. They still had the whole summer to see if more enrolled. She is just asking for the School Committee to do what they said they would do.

Mrs. Dugan stated the money left over in the School budget has to be prepaid to Special Education or turned back to the Town.

Barbara Stefan stated she has 3 children (4th, 2nd and Kindergarten) and agrees that class size is important to some extent but there are other things that weigh in. She stated she was glad to see so many parents here tonight.

Bianca Bersani-40 Forest Avenue asked if the budget for next year includes 6 teachers. Chairman Astino responded the budget does include 6.

Debra Kenealy 84 Old Pasture Road asked how enrollment how is it being tracked. What is being done to be sure that parents do what they should. Conversation didn't happen over the summer. She suggested they follow enrollment year after year. Chairman Astino stated they get enrollment updates monthly. The business office tracks enrollment. Mrs. Maher agreed that tracking enrollment for years is a good idea based on history over the past couple of years.

Bianca Bersani—40 Forest Avenue asked why 5 ½ teachers was budgeted for this year's Kindergarten and then the money was taken away. Superintendent Cataldo stated there were only 3 students enrolled for half day. They couldn't run a program for just 3 students. Superintendent Cataldo stated their decision are always based on what is best for the children. After listening tonight she realizes that the parents do not agree this is a good mechanism.

Eric Spear-15 Wood Way stated he chose to raise his children in Cohasset because of the schools. They should have different scenarios and be prepared when additional families move into town with children. The Town should be prepared and plan for the unexpected. Chairman Astino stated the budget starts from zero every year not from the previous year's budget. Mrs. Dugan added they cannot have a range of scenarios because they are given one number for the budget. Mrs. Stefan stated they do have the option of putting a cap on Full Day Kindergarten. They could turn parents away at a certain date.

Mrs. McGoldrick stated the Committee has an executive session on the agenda. She thanked everyone for coming out. She stated clearly the School Committee has some action items that they will address. She encouraged everyone to get stay involved and attend Board of Selectmen meetings.

Chairman Astino asked for a motion to go into executive session for the purpose of #2 strategy re; bargaining with nonunion personnel and #3 to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation. The Committee will come back in to open session for the purpose of adjourning. Mrs. McGoldrick moved the motion and it was seconded by Mrs. Maher. Roll Call Vote; Barbara Stefan-Aye, Katie Dugan-Aye, Jeanne Astino-Aye, Mary McGoldrick-Aye, Ellen Maher-Aye.

The Committee went into executive session at 8:13 p.m.

Motion by Mrs. McGoldrick to adjourn seconded by Mrs. Dugan and the vote was unanimous (5-0).

Meeting adjourned at 10:04 p.m.