



SCHOOL COMMITTEE

BUSINESS MEETING OPEN SESSION MINUTES

November 19, 2024

Meeting:	School Committee
Date:	November 19, 2024
Location:	MERMHS Learning Commons
Attendees:	Pamela Beaudoin, Superintendent Michelle Cresta, Director of Finance & Operations Chris Reed, Chairperson Jake Foster Kate Koch-Sundquist, Vice-Chair Anna Mitchell Erica Spencer Theresa Whitman
Absent:	John Binieris
Guests:	
Recorded by:	Maria Schmidt
Link to Reports and Presentations	https://www.mersd.org/domain/785

A. Call to Order of – Mr. Reed called the School Committee Business meeting to order at 6:04 p.m.

B. Business Meeting Open Session

- 1) Public Comment (Guidelines for public comment can be found in sections BEDH and BEDH-E of the School Committee policy manual)** - none
- 2) Chairperson's Report** – Mr. Reed followed up on SC representation for the high school Student Advisory Council meeting. Ms. Spencer expressed interest in attending meetings on behalf of the SC. Mr. Reed asked if any other members were also interested. Superintendent Beaudoin said that meetings are planned for the second Tuesday of each month, with adjustments for holidays. Currently, meetings are

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scheduled for December 4, January 22, and February 26. Mr. Foster and Ms. Koch-Sundquist also expressed interest in attending some meetings, and Mr. Reed plans to attend occasionally. The superintendent said that the Student Advisory operates more informally unless there is a topic of current concern. The council is intended to provide students with a forum for expressing themselves to listening adults. The advisory council plans to focus on budget input at their January meeting. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the Student Advisory Council plans to hold a joint session with the School Committee this spring. Since the SC representative to the council is an informal position, and there are not any concerns to prohibit it, Mr. Reed encouraged any other SC member interested in attending to do so after informing Ms. Spencer.

3) Student Report – Stella Straub, student representative to the School Committee

- a. AP Classes –** Ms. Straub said that many students take advantage of the wide AP offerings at the high school. Currently, the high school discourages students from taking AP classes before their junior year. The advisory council discussed opening certain AP classes to sophomores, particularly those considered to run at a slower pace. This could provide an introduction to students regarding the pacing and demands of these classes and reduce the number of APs taken by juniors and seniors each year. Many upper classmen take 4-5 per year.
- b. Graduation Requirements –** With the recent elimination of the MCAS as a requirement for graduation, Principal Sgroi solicited feedback from the Student Advisory Council as the high school begins to think about graduation requirement updates. Ms. Straub shared that MERSD has no art requirement for graduation. However, some colleges require art credit for admission. As possible additions to graduation requirements, the advisory council discussed an art and computer science requirement. Computer science is a skill that the students believe is applicable across many study and career areas. Ms. Straub said that the council also discussed linking graduation requirements to student interests, for example computer science and art/design.

Questions – Ms. Spencer said that students report a large jump from sophomore to junior year in workload and asked if this would smooth that transition. Ms. Straub thought it would and that most students think the sophomore year is easier than the freshman year. She said that one AP class is a good introduction to the expectations of AP work, moving from memorization to deeper understanding. Given the impact to GPA by opening classes to sophomores, Ms. Spencer asked if it would put more pressure on sophomores to take AP classes. Ms. Straub said that students have been allowed to enroll in APs in tenth grade if they push hard enough, so pressure is already evident and would not change. Officially allowing sophomore AP participation would make it fairer for those students following district guidelines. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that there are some specific APs that could be good candidates for sophomores. AP History covers some of the same material as US History 2, usually taken by sophomores. This track would open a spot in a student's schedule for electives of interest. Ms. Koch-

Sundquist asked if students self-study for AP tests. Ms. Straub said that few students do so because the class would not be included in their transcript, and many colleges do not award college credit for lower passing tests. Superintendent Beaudoin shared that some students are able to take online AP courses due to scheduling conflicts. Mr. Foster commented that, since AP courses are college level work, taking five APs is equivalent to a full college course load. Mr. Foster said that he thought the district had a three-AP limit. Ms. Straub said that students over the limit are supposed to sign a form, although she does not know of students having to do so. Ms. Whitman asked for clarification on the process of changing graduation requirements. The superintendent said that Principal Sgroi solicited input on the program of studies from the student advisory council as an early component of review. Mr. Foster suggested that concerns about art and computer science may be better addressed via guidance, because many colleges have unique requirements, and the district could not account for them all. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that, because recent legislation eliminated the MCAS graduation requirement, the high school will be reviewing requirements. Principal Sgroi holds this charge and has a timeline for the review. As an early component, Ms. Sgroi opened the discussion with the Student Advisory Board. This may result in some course recommendations for next year. Proposals for change to the graduation requirements are not expected until 2027. Mr. Foster confirmed that the graduation requirement lives in School Committee policy.

4) Consent Agenda –

- Acceptance of Warrants: AP Vouchers 1024-1027 and payroll warrant for November 7, 2024

Mr. Foster moved to approve the AP Vouchers 1024-1027 and payroll warrant for November 7, 2024. Ms. Koch-Sundquist seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

- Minutes for approval: November 4, 2024

Ms. Koch-Sundquist moved to approve the minutes from November 4, 2024. Mr. Foster seconded the motion.

The motion passed 5-0. Ms. Spencer abstained.

- Overnight/Out of State Travel
 - DECA State Competition, Boston, MA, February 27-March 1, 2025
 - DECA International Competition – Orlando, FL, April 25 – April 30, 2025 (provided team qualifies).
 - Senior Class Whitewater Rafting Trip – Forks, ME, June 3-4, 2025

Ms. Whitman moved to approve out of state travel for the DECA competitions and the senior class rafting trip. Ms. Spencer seconded the motion.

Discussion: Ms. Koch-Sundquist sought clarification on overnight trips as she thought they had been discontinued. Superintendent Beaudoin said that only grade 5-8, school-based trips were discontinued. These were considered part of the curriculum and had to be accessible to all students. It became impossible to staff these trips. The current high school trips are run outside this context. They are staffed by an advisor, who assumes these responsibilities when accepting the position, and can also take parent volunteers. The clubs can choose to do other things that are not overnight, as well.

The motion passed unanimously.

5) Sub-Committee Reports

- **Elementary Facilities/MSBC Sub-Committee** (John Binieris/Theresa Whitman) – No Report
- **Finance Committee** (Jake Foster/Anna Mitchell) – No Report
- **Negotiation Team Sub-Committee** (Kate Koch-Sundquist/Chris Reed) – No Report
- **Policy/Communication Sub-Committee** (Kate Koch-Sundquist/Erica Spencer/Theresa Whitman) – Reserves Policy Discussion. Ms. Spencer asked for the School Committee to provide input on four components of the Reserve Policy draft being updated by the subcommittee. These components were not part of the reserve policy draft from last year but are included in the Triton template.
 - OPEB – Traditionally, OPEB was not included in reserve policy representations, but it is a reserve fund. Questions have arisen about how and when OPEB funds can be used. The question to the SC is whether OPEB should be included in a reserve policy, whether housed in its own policy or with the larger reserve policy.
 - E&D Threshold percentage for the fund. The current policy template contains both an 8% reserve fund target and a 3% threshold in the E&D section. This second percentage is specified in the reserve policies of several neighboring districts including Masco, Hamilton/Wenham, and Triton. In rough estimation, 3% of the operating budget equated to \$1M. If E&D were to be finalized at \$1.4M, the SC would be trying to maintain the \$1M for the reserve and there would be \$400K in excess for the SC to direct.
 - Usage of Excess – In the preceding example, \$400K would be the amount in excess after the threshold is accounted for. The SC would direct its usage.
 - Stabilization Fund – Ms. Spencer asked if the School Committee should develop and memorialize a specific practice for funding the stabilization reserve account through the reserve policy. Ms. Spencer said that E&D is typically thought of as a rainy-day fund. The stabilization fund is the funding mechanism for the capital budget. Ms. Spencer suggested that the SC have a plan in place for funding anticipated capital needs, particularly given the age of the middle/high school building, that allows for repair without having to return to the towns to request more money. Ms. Spencer expressed her appreciation for the updated draft because it addresses high level issues that the SC should discuss. However, Ms.

Spencer said that the current draft contains language about recommendations of financial ratings agencies as high as 15%. Ms. Spencer said inclusion of these figures is unnecessary.

Discussion: Ms. Koch-Sundquist added that stabilization fund monies are easier to spend during the year. E&D funds require a budget amendment. Stabilization funds are accessible to the district via a School Committee vote. Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked if the two funds earn the same interest. Ms. Cresta confirmed that they do. Ms. Mitchell asked for the balance in all the reserve funds. Ms. Cresta said that the stabilization fund has about \$1.5M and the E&D has about \$1.4M. Ms. Mitchell asked about the OPEB mandate, required contributions, and why the SC would want to include it in the reserve policy. Ms. Cresta said it must be fully funded eventually, but that end point is far off. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that the META contract specifies that the difference between the cost of the previous healthcare plan (the plan that existed before the OPEB trust was created) and the current cost of healthcare must be invested in the trust yearly. There is some latitude to contribute less to reduce the growth of retiree health so that it doesn't negatively impact the rest of the budget. This was leveraged last year so that the district could reduce the operational budget. The district is committed to putting that ear-marked \$150K back into the fund this year, if able. Recognizing that this is an area that should be examined further, the current contract contains language that a review will be done before the next contract is negotiated in 2027.

Mr. Foster stated that he approves of including OPEB in the policy, to define and memorialize what the reserve accounts are, but that any target percentage should not include OPEB. Mr. Foster questioned the purpose of the 3% E&D threshold and said it creates a ceiling. This is counter to the School Committee's previous agreement to use a target rather than a range. He emphasized preserving 8% as an overall target. If the 3% is utilized and the stabilization threshold is at 10%, the overall percentage is much higher than 8%. Mr. Foster said that it is important to plan to fund the stabilization fund but that this should be done within the budget process instead of through policy.

Ms. Whitman said that there are a number of items in the current draft which the SC will consider as a committee. Consideration will help the SC get to the next level. Mr. Foster said that the subcommittee previously had three goals when considering the reserve policy: 1) To define the reserve accounts, 2) to specify how the accounts are funded and guide use of reserve funds, and 3) to articulate a target. Mr. Foster advocated for sticking to these three goals. He clarified that this referred to the mechanism followed to fund account, i.e. taking a 2/3 vote to use, not to specific percentages or dollar amounts.

Ms. Koch-Sundquist said that this is accounted for in the new draft but also still up for refinement. Final details require an SC discussion and mindful decision. Mr. Foster asked why 3% was included. Ms. Koch-Sundquist said that it is the recommendation from the auditor as a minimum. Ms. Spencer asked if there is value in establishing a process for future school committees, particularly given the

anticipated capital needs on the district's horizon. Ms. Koch-Sundquist stated that by setting the 3% floor, the SC knows what it can work with, either applying excess to the operational budget or to the stabilization fund. Mr. Foster asked what the 3% enables the SC to do that it cannot already and whether it would force School Committees decisions in any way. Ms. Whitman said that it provides grounding for the SC to return to in order to keep the district reserves at healthy levels. Mr. Foster expressed concern that this direction results in a floor, which was not the previous goal. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the language of the Triton policy builds the stabilization fund which the SC can access with a vote. This is as opposed to growing the E&D budget which necessitates a budget amendment at the School Committee level and approval at two town meetings. It commits the SC to fund school-based projects with reserves while maintaining SC control over those reserves. Ms. Spencer expressed concern that the district could rapidly exceed its reserve targets with the proposed thresholds. Ms. Mitchell asked what problem the proposed 3% floor would solve. Superintendent Beaudoin said that it would address concerns about how much of the E&D fund is being used for the operational budget. The superintendent stated that the SC needs to examine further the sustainability of using reserves for the budget. Ms. Koch-Sundquist said that the SC would be able to choose whether excess goes to the stabilization fund or to the operational budget. Ms. Spencer said it is appealing to arrive at budget season with a certified E&D number and the knowledge that the SC can determine how much to contribute to the operating budget and how much to put into the stabilization fund. Ms. Whitman agreed, saying that each year there is a question of how to use the E&D and how to decide what an appropriate amount is. Ms. Whitman said the point of policy is to provide that kind of guidance. Ms. Whitman stated that the SC would take an intentional look and make that decision. Ms. Whitman said that the SC needs to be aware of funding stabilization. The district has been relying on interest from the Memorial building project, but that pot is dwindling. Ms. Whitman stated that small cap budget lines are too often cut when the budget is discussed. Mr. Foster said that policy would not change the budget conversation. Ms. Mitchell suggested having a maximum above which monies would be applied to the operational budget. Ms. Mitchell questioned what is categorized as a capital expense and said that a simpler policy is better and will last for many years. Ms. Spencer noted that Ms. Mitchell does not like the 3% because the SC can make similar moves with anything in excess of 8%.

Ms. Spencer asked if Ms. Mitchell wanted to define a process for funding the stabilization fund. Ms. Mitchell said that funding does not have to be done in the policy. Ms. Whitman stated that the operational budget does not provide for long term needs. Ms. Mitchell agreed that a plan for long term operational growth is needed. She asked if there is enough money to make yearly commitments to fund the stabilization fund while funding the educational program. Mr. Foster stated that he and Ms. Mitchell believe long term operational needs can be funded through the budget and strategic planning and do not need to be codified in policy. Mr. Foster said the SC can choose to make long term planning part of the budget and to transfer E&D to the stabilization fund without putting it in the

policy. Ms. Koch-Sundquist said that it is an attempt to define where to get money to fill gaps in operational budget while not drawing from stabilization fund because those funds are ear-marked for future needs.

Ms. Whitman stated that she does not see policy as limiting and believes it is useful in community conversation to explain the decision-making process. Ms. Mitchell pointed out that the policy could tie up funds in the stabilization fund that the SC may want to access to meet a future need in the operational budget. Ms. Koch-Sundquist stated that some of the present concerns may be resulting from confusion between the Triton policy and the proposed MERSD draft and suggested having the policy subcommittee present the actual draft for a first read.

Superintendent Beaudoin cautioned against the use of one-time funds to invest in the program and likened E&D use to a bridge loan. Reserve use accelerates the funding problem and leads to a larger gap to overcome later. Ms. Spencer said that a funding cliff is not ideal. She pointed out that there is money left over each year, and some community members want to see that go back into the operational budget. Superintendent Beaudoin said that there is an anticipated \$1.9M in facilities costs over the next five years and no mechanism to replenish the use of the \$1.5M in the fund. Each year, the E&D gets tighter. Ms. Cresta stated that a large portion of the E&D can be attributed to interest income in the Memorial building project fund and that is waning. Ms. Spencer asked why there is still money in the Memorial building fund. Final payments are awaiting the final MSBA signoff. Superintendent Beaudoin re-emphasized that level service costs are rising faster than assessments. At some point, an override to the towns would equal the total cost.

Ms. Mitchell suggested that the finance subcommittee run numbers to provide a full picture using the proposed targets to see what the outcomes would be.

Ms. Mitchell said that OPEB should be defined in the policy but not included in the target percentage. Superintendent Beaudoin shared the MERSD website page. This page includes an annual OPEB letter showing the district's liability. Ms. Cresta said that, as of this month, the fund has \$5.8M, with over \$22M unfunded.

Mr. Reed stated that policy is for providing guidelines, and he supports that. He said that he does not want to be overly concise in the policy and said that policy can provide guidelines for communicating with other stakeholders. Mr. Reed supported including OPEB in the policy. Mr. Reed complimented the work done so far.

Superintendent Beaudoin stated that the OPEB contract stipulates that 80% of contributions will come from the savings previously detailed with the remaining 20% from an additional line item in the budget. The district has been unable to include this line item because it becomes a weight in the assessment.

6) Superintendent's Report – General Update.

- a. Shrek – Middle/High School production. The district middle/high school musical closed after an incredible show that featured a live orchestra accompaniment and benefitted from recent tech upgrades to the sound system.
- b. MCAS – eliminated as a high school graduation requirement during recent election. Superintendent Beaudoin reported that beginning this year students will only need to fulfill the local requirements of their district. The superintendent said that the district is awaiting input from DESE on next steps on testing requirements and the scope of local decision making. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the future of federal funding is uncertain, following the election. The superintendent said that federal funding, including for Title I and special education, could be used as a lever with states. This is something that will have to be kept in mind during budget work. The changes to MCAS put the district in a healthy position to examine graduation requirements.
- c. Ongoing
 - i. Library Task Force – The task force consists of 20 members, and their work is ongoing. A report out is planned for the fall of 2025. It will inform budget work. The focus of the task force is to identify how the library program will support authentic learning and student needs.
 - ii. Busing Options – Discussion continues with Salter Transportation regarding bus problems. Salter promises that they have additional drivers in their training pipeline. Ms. Cresta is working on an RFP and examining how the district could exit its contract, should this become necessary.
 - iii. Cell Phone Policy
 - iv. Middle/High School Schedule Alignment
 - v. Winter Concert dates have been released by all schools

7) Continued Business –

- a. Budget FY26 Planning – Superintendent Beaudoin provided insight into the budget building process. District administration coordinates with school principals to develop and integrate school and departmental operational budgets into the initial district budget proposal. This proposal will consist of two components – level services and expanded effort. The level services budget maintains current staffing and program levels. Expanded effort refers to additional costs to meet program and staff expansion requests, comply with federal and state mandates, or implement strategic plan priorities and best practices. The superintendent and director of finance and operations collaborate with the School Committee to determine annual budget goals and parameters for budget development. The director of finance creates forecasts for revenue sources (state and federal funding, grants, activity fees, and program fees), mandatory obligations (health insurance, salary increases, retirement benefits, and capital and operating expenses), and town assessments needed to fund the MERSD budget. The MERSD budget is constructed seven months before the fiscal year begins and requires several assumptions. These include state funding levels which are not disclosed until late spring. Health insurance costs are not released until mid-winter, but an estimate is included in budget work based on the recommendation of the district's broker. Special education expenses are a factor which can

fluctuate significantly throughout the school year. The sequence of the budget process is determined by a combination of town bylaws, the MERSD regional agreement, and state education laws.

In December, the superintendent and director of finance and operations will present the draft budget to the School Committee and schedule a public hearing for review of the draft budget at which community members will learn about the budget, ask questions, and provide feedback. Further adjustments to the budget continue through March and April. At the Manchester and Essex Town Meetings, voters will be asked to approve the MERSD budget. Both towns must approve the budget, or the district must operate under the previous year's budget.

Budget Calendar upcoming dates:

- School and Department Budgets Due November 21, 2024
- Tentative Budget Presentation to the School Committee – December 3, 2024
- Tentative Budget Presentation in Public Hearing – December 11, 2024

School Committee Discussion: Superintendent Beaudoin solicited input from committee members on key budget assumptions and priorities:

- Budget Scope: Parameters to establish for the initial budget given that the Tentative Budget is traditionally the highwater mark
 - FY26 Budget Scenarios: For example: level-funded, level-service, aspirational, percentage-based, or another format
 - Non-META salaried employees – recommendations for addressing the unequal growth rates between META (Teacher/TA) and non-META staff.
 - Use of reserves: How should reserve funds be incorporated into the budget.
- Common Definition of Budget Narrative – for School Committee alignment
- Areas for Growth: Takeaways from last year's budget process

Mr. Reed opened the floor to budget input from SC members.

Ms. Whitman stated that last year the SC received specific requests from both towns regarding the budget, and this was helpful in forming an early consensus to avoid cuts and support level services. This gave needed time to the towns to do their work. Ms. Whitman said that she would be satisfied with a budget narrative that is a philosophy statement of what the budget is trying to accomplish. Ms. Whitman asked for clarification about who is included in the category of non-META salaries. Superintendent Beaudoin replied that this would include technical, facilities, and administrative support staff. The district plans to take an individualized approach and is surveying local districts to gauge the market. Ms. Whitman said that she is inclined to focus on staff that have not joined the district during recent restructuring when positions were re-aligned to the market. Ms.

Whitman advocated for a baseline budget of level services and said that she would like to see a multi-year planned reduction of reserves use as a funding source. Ms. Whitman also stated that use of reserves to offset extraordinary healthcare costs would be an appropriate use of those funds.

Ms. Koch-Sundquist agreed with Ms. Whitman's points and advocated for a level services budget. Ms. Koch-Sundquist said it is important to consider the significant capital expenses that the district will face. Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked to see an additional budget projection that accounts for recommended continued program growth.

Ms. Mitchell said that she would like to see a different budget layout that is easier to understand than the numbers-centered past format. It should address key growth areas. Ms. Mitchell asked to see the budget tied to FTE to see how it grows. Ms. Mitchell advocated for tying a detailed budget to a multi-year capital plan.

Mr. Foster said that the most important thing is to put the budget in the context of the bigger picture. Voters will soon be asked to approve the Essex building project and an eventual funding correction for the operational budget. Mr. Foster said that the worst outcome this year would be to push the towns for a correction/override that only gets the district through the current year rather than a plan that overcomes challenges over multiple years. Mr. Foster said that he is looking forward to the joint Fin Com meeting to find out what the town partners can handle. Mr. Foster said that the district should use reserve funds to prevent an override. Mr. Foster cautioned that, when putting everything on the table, it will be important to keep priorities in mind because the towns are facing the same issues as in the past.

Ms. Spencer asked for a budget with no cuts to program and efficiency savings wherever possible. She said that this year has showed the benefit of incorporating principal requests into the budget. Ms. Spencer said that it is particularly important, given upcoming asks like the building project, that residents do not think that programming is suffering because of the Essex building project. She is very interested in what the principals think they need. Ms. Spencer advocated for funding stabilization in a measured and systematic way, built into the budget if not policy. Regarding non-META salaries, Ms. Spencer said she would hope that non-META employees would not outpace META employees. Ms. Spencer said that she is comfortable using reserve funds when appropriate. When utilized, people understand what they are for rather than seeing reserves as an abstract that strikes some community members as a slush fund. By using stabilization funds consistently, the appropriate usage of E&D will be clearer. Ms. Spencer stated that an important issue for the budget narrative to address is why the district has declining enrollment but rising costs. Although the SC has reviewed this issue many times, the issue is likely to be raised during the budget process. Ms. Spencer advocated for clearly and concisely articulating the district's position and the key drivers and being prepared to address questions head-on.

Ms. Mitchell said that there has been major swings between the tentative budgets healthcare estimates and the final budget numbers for healthcare. Ms. Mitchell would like to start with a lower estimate and then use reserve funds to make up the difference if the healthcare estimate comes in higher. Ms. Mitchell pointed out that the percent came down quite a bit last year from early estimates.

Mr. Reed said that he believes that the most important part of the budget narrative is the opportunity for all committee members to get behind it and speak with one voice when discussing the budget. Mr. Reed said that he would like to see a budget that accounts for additions important to the continued improvement of the program. Mr. Reed said that there are always budgets constraints, and he does not want to focus on that narrow lens because it is a disservice to the students.

Clarifying Comments: Ms. Whitman advocated for collaboration with town partners regarding healthcare costs because a higher final healthcare number would be a direct hit to them when the final budget comes in higher. Ms. Whitman suggested asking the Fin Coms how they would prefer to resolve that situation.

Superintendent Beaudoin clarified that the tentative budget has traditionally been a high watermark presentation, using the highest numbers quoted, including those for healthcare. This year, the initial healthcare quote was 18% higher than last year. This week, that quote increased to 21% over last year. The superintendent said that some of this increase stems from current utilization. The current estimate translates to \$800K more. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the district can go back out to bid for a new provider. Ms. Spencer reminded the SC that last year the joint Fin Com accepted the preliminary estimate but requested that if estimates came down they would want any savings to go back to the towns. Ms. Spencer said that using the high estimate has implications for the budget in other areas. Although it is difficult to set a number far below the best current estimate for healthcare, Ms. Spencer questioned what the district is losing in other opportunities as a result. Superintendent Beaudoin said that it is not only the quote that is limiting for the district. It is the fact that healthcare consistently grows at twice the rate of the rest of the budget. Even if later estimates for healthcare are lower, the rate of increase results in a yearly deficit in healthcare that needs to be made up in other parts of the budget. Superintendent Beaudoin said that knowing that there is a starting deficit makes it tough for the towns to fund level services. Growth then comes by restructuring. This has some healthy aspects for the district, like staying efficient and innovating, but it is not tenable long-term.

Mr. Foster urged caution when using the term “savings” with budgets since there is not savings but rather different proposed budgets. Mr. Foster confirmed that the high mark tentative budget is for the benefit of town planning. He built off Ms. Spencer’s question to ask if there are other assumptions, in other budget lines, that should reflect growth. This would allow those areas to be considered independently of the changes to healthcare estimates. The superintendent asked if

there are budget numbers that are too high. Ms. Whitman said that any numbers are likely to feel too high to town partners but there is a benefit to seeing an actual cost budget, without reserves, for visibility. Mr. Foster said that although this makes sense, the SC needs to remain sensitive to the financial situation of its partners.

Ms. Whitman noted that last year the district started at a certain level but already had input from the principals. As savings came in, the SC was able to balance it with their requests. Superintendent Beaudoin noted that staffing last year was primarily achieved by staff re-organization. Only \$60K in healthcare savings went to staff.

Superintendent Beaudoin said that the town Fin Coms have previously discouraged the district from bringing in an “inflated” budget, and they may see a real cost, no reserves tentative budget as inflated. It may not be received well, even just removing reserve use. Ms. Whitman advocated for having a clear view of what the budget truly is. Mr. Reed said that the baseline from the towns is likely to be for a budget with 2.5% growth. Ms. Mitchell asked for the corresponding dollar increase for healthcare. Ms. Cresta replied that 21% is equal to \$800K. Superintendent Beaudoin said that, assuming a 21% rise in healthcare, no reserve use, and growth across other domains between 3.5-4%, the budget would be \$1.3-1.4M short.

Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked for the consensus on non-META staff. The superintendent said that she heard the consensus to be that the SC would prefer targeted re-sets. Ms. Whitman proposed sending a heads-up email to the Fin Com group before the budget meeting. Ms. Spener stated that there should be a budget presented which clearly presents all factors. She said this does not represent a “pie-in-the-sky” scenario and would not be intended to be inflammatory. Ms. Spencer said it would allow the budget process to proceed logically.

Superintendent Beaudoin asked for additional input on school choice enrollment for next year. Previously, the district planned to add an additional 20 students via school choice. The district would re-examine where to absorb these students based on siblings, the number of choice students exiting, projections of class size, etc. Ms. Mitchell confirmed that 20 students is equal to \$100K in income for the district. Ms. Spencer noted that it would be some time before the impact of 3A legislature would be likely to raise enrollment. Mr. Reed said that additional housing will also increase town funding. Superintendent Beaudoin said the district will look to add 20 school choice students.

b. School Committee Ongoing Work

- i. Goal Development – The School Committee reviewed progress on their goals, having finalized three goals in previous meetings. Mr. Foster stated that the committee had determined that completion of the superintendent’s evaluation falls under the scope of SC practice and is not part of goal development. Mr. Reed removed that item as a

potential goal. The goals will stand as previously finalized.

Superintendent Beaudoin requested that the three goals, in their final iteration, be sent to her for posting to the School Committee webpage.

- ii. Subcommittee Charge Development – Superintendent Beaudoin stated that some school committees develop formal descriptions of what each subcommittee is tasked with doing. Mr. Foster said there is a list from FY2022-2023. Ms. Whitman stated that clarifying the charge of subcommittees would address the issue of what should be accomplished at the full committee level versus in subcommittee. Ms. Whitman said that this is an important consideration for smoothing the transition of new SC members. Mr. Reed stated that this applies mostly to the policy and finance subcommittees. Ms. Mitchell proposed using the existing charges. Ms. Whitman said that the existing subcommittee members might consider keeping the charge in mind as they work and creating a more robust statement for review in the spring. Superintendent Beaudoin pushed back on this issue, stating that it should be the School Committee that sets a scope of work and charge for subcommittees, providing clarity so that new members can pick up the work and understand their role. This would be the standard going forward, with whomever is on the subcommittees. Ms. Koch-Sundquist commented that some charges are the same year-to-year and others are specific to the goals of the School Committee for a that year. Mr. Foster said that he had previously assumed that the finance subcommittee was tasked with consideration of budget and planning issues and working with the towns to think about that planning and its implications. His impression was that it included tracking yearly finance. However, that is not what was presented to Mr. Foster when he joined the subcommittee. He said the charge should be clear. Mr. Foster said that the current suggestion that the finance subcommittee examine reserve use implies a multiyear budget planning task. Mr. Foster said that it is important all members have the same understanding of the roles. Ms. Whitman stated that her experience on the finance subcommittee varied by each iteration of the subcommittee, and it would have been helpful to have a charge that was consistent from group to group. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the subcommittees have taken on different forms. In the past, subcommittees did not have standing meetings and were an as-needed group to address a given issue. For the finance subcommittee, the SC chair and vice-chair were only tasked with attending collaboration meetings. Ms. Mitchell's interest in accounting and technical aspects of budgeting have led the finance subcommittee to pursue additional goals, mirroring the Triton model, and the finance subcommittee currently meets regularly to review vouchers and reports. Mr. Foster has proposed that the committee also take up planning. The superintendent said that these charges are acceptable, but that the superintendent and business manager should not be in the position to expand the role of any subcommittee based on the interests and desires

of its current members. This could be increasingly problematic as new people come into positions. Superintendent Beaudoin asked that the SC consider what it wants subcommittees to hold as recurring responsibilities. This would still allow the SC to assign additional tasks to the appropriate subcommittee as they arise. The superintendent offered to see if other schools have a written charge for their subcommittees as a jumping off point. Mr. Reed said that this was a good start and the SC will continue to review the charge of its subcommittees.

- 8) School Committee Comment** – Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked about utilities estimates in the budget. Ms. Cresta replied that utilities show only a slight uptick. This is because the district locked in rates. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the district would be in good shape, if not for healthcare. The superintendent expressed concern over federal funding.

Mr. Foster shared that he was able to continue his conversation about MCAS and special education students with Ms. Collins. Consequently, he has a new understanding about what counts as a disability for the MCAS. Only students with an IEP are included. Mr. Foster said that this implies that MCAS performance is not a good measure of growth for students with disabilities and asked what would be. Mr. Foster stated that, in considering this question, Ms. Collins said that the district could compare current scores with previous scores for those who have graduated out of special education. This is a possible way to look beyond common MCAS reporting. Ms. Koch-Sundquist stated that the issue is important to the conversation about how to measure academic excellence. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the SC may want to bring Ms. Collins back in the new year to review the additional work done with data to shed light on this topic. The district also reviewed AP testing data and determined, when expanding the metric to include students previously on an IEP, that there were 13 students in this category who took AP tests. Their scores were comparable or better than general education students. Ms. Collins found the same to be true for MCAS scores with students who had exited from special education. Superintendent Beaudoin said that an abbreviated SPED review for the School Committee is tentatively planned for February.

C. Adjourn

Ms. Koch-Sundquist moved to adjourn the School Committee business meeting; Ms. Whitman seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Meeting Adjourned at 8:19 pm

School Committee Future Meetings

- December 3, 2024
- December 11, 2024, Wednesday
- December 19, 2024, Thursday