SCHOOL COMMITTEE

(Official Report)

Special Meeting **Date: March 15, 2018**

Called for immediately following the Superintendent's Presentation on the FY 2019 Budget in the Dr. Henrietta S. Attles Meeting Room, Cambridge Rindge and Latin School, 459 Broadway, Cambridge, for the purpose of a Budget Workshop.

Members Present: Ms. Bowman, Ms. Dexter, Mr. Fantini, Ms. Kelly, Mr. Kimbrough, Ms. Nolan, and Mayor McGovern

Also Present: Dr. Salim, Superintendent of Schools
Dr. Turk, Deputy Superintendent of Schools
Dr. Adams, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction
Dr. Likis, Chief Planning Officer
Ms. MacDonald, Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Education
Ms. Allen, Executive Director of Human Resources
Mr. Maloney, Chief Operating Officer
Ms. Spinner Chief Financial Officer
Ms. Spera, Interim OSS Director
Mr. Monahan, CEA President

Ms. Dexter in the Chair.

A quorum of the School Committee being present, the Chair called the meeting to order at 6:45 pm.

The Chair spoke about all of the hard work that the Superintendent and his Cabinet do to create the budget, adding that the process is led my Ms Claire Spinner, the Chief Financial Officer, and her budget team, producing a document that wins awards for clarity and precision.

Ms. Dexter stated the system is not perfect, some things need to be fixed, however she pointed out what is right with our schools; we offer our students a lot of services and programs that other districts do not offer. We have peer mediation services at CRLS and a staff person, Ms. Chandra Banks, that runs it teaching our students how to solve conflicts with their peers, we have a very strong Visual and Performing Arts department, we have family liaisons at all of our schools, we have a Kodaly music program at our elementary schools, three immersion programs, one world language program, we have pre-school programs, extra social workers, we have a strong careers program – RSTA, excellent athletics and the Kimbrough Scholars project where our CRLS students work with Northeastern University Law students to investigate cold cases from the 1960s civil rights movement. In the areas of where we need to improve, Ms. Dexter suggested the district needs to take better care of our under performing students.

Ms. Dexter stated that she sees some very challenging and thrilling ideas in the upcoming budget and she appreciates the work that went into it. Ms. Dexter has positive thoughts on the Design Lab. She is also positive about tracking segregation to make sure we can eliminate it in our schools and employ more teachers of color. Her questions about the budget include whether there are enough resources to really address our problematic issues; there are eight schools that still do not have social workers, and the design coach is not full time, no expansion of Kodaly and co-teaching models; we have money for chrome books, what about other areas, it was also noted that there are no extra guidance counselors at CRLS. Ms. Dexter suggests we make sure we are properly resourcing the budget.

The Chair opened the floor for comments and questions from the Members.

Ms. Nolan began with how much she appreciates all of the work that has gone into this proposed budget; she has not had the time to digest the document yet, so she may have more questions later. She wants to look at how the district has been evaluating programs that they have done in the past. There have been two extensive reports done in the past; coaching and special education. The report on special education seems to be very different from where we are headed now. Ms. Nolan also stated that she would like coaching to be pedagogy based not content based. She also referenced a review on the response to intervention and she is looking for answers on that too.

Dr. Salim answered regarding coaching: the intention was to bring our coaches together as a district. They are used in very different ways across the buildings, they all have different strengths. He focuses on inclusive learning and how they can work on socio emotional learning. Pedagogy practice is not strong enough to cover what coaches do, pedagogy works better in academics.

Ms. Nolan stated that upper school math really starts K-5 and since there has been a lot of focus on literacy, she suggested we to give a closer look to numeracy. She also asked about adding support to socio economic learning, why are we not adding social workers to all schools? All schools have students with different needs and students at risk.

Dr. Salim stated the proposal came from an analysis of case loads. All schools are subject to a period of crisis. All schools do have an adjustment counselor. There was a robust analysis that went into identifying which schools needed extra social workers.

Mayor McGovern thanked Dr. Salim for the presentation. He followed up on Ms. Nolan's point about the social worker position. It is hard to be a half time faculty or staff member. It is even more difficult for a social worker to be half time. At any given time a child may be in need of a social worker, he suggested that an eye be kept on this rather closely. When a student goes from 90s to 80s someone needs to look into it. It can happen at any time. He is happy with the proposed budget; it shows that he has paid attention to what the public, teachers and School Committee have been saying.

Dr. Salim answered that they are still in the process of solidifying what the new roles will be. There are other creative ways to engage families. He has been looking at how we work with our partners on the city side and the after school partners and will try to link the goal settings. There are many sources responsible for Social Emotional Learners.

Mayor McGovern spoke on Hearts, Minds and Hands and asked Dr. Salim to explain the process of how the decision was made not to add staff to the classroom.

Dr. Salim replied this proposal represents a number of new positions of what we see as the intentional focus in the 7th grade; there are a number of gaps at that level as a result of lots of different discussions. Overall there are 39 new positions. We thought about the priorities, district plan alignment, and the feedback from staff and educators.

Ms. Kelly stated she appreciates that the case load analysis was done. Being able to see the data is helpful. She is pleased with how well he used his resources to make the budget. The emphasis on equity and opportunity for all students is clear. The Food Market and the Weekend Backpack programs have assisted families and helps them feel supported by the schools. By addressing these issues we can continue to develop community with our schools.

Mr. Kimbrough appreciates Ms. Spinner putting this budget together; saying he will treasure it for a lifetime. He would like to know what the costs allocated for cultural competency and anti racism work is, based on a district this size. He also asked if the new Research and Assessment position will make sure the training we are doing is actually working.

Dr. Salim stated that to be frank, having worked in other districts, cultural proficiency is hard work and no district has figured it out. Everyone starts it, but the results vary. What does it actually mean in terms of

practice as an educator? He stated that we are trying a different model. The Nellie Mae Grant is going to think about how to challenge teachers in their work and come up with answers.

Mr. Kimbrough stated that $50,000.00 was allotted to last year's budget to get through the work at Wheelock. $50,000.00 will be allotted to Nellie Mae Grant this year. Are we evaluating and seeing any results as this being an impediment to student achievement?

Dr. Salim answered: we have a standard progress monitoring meeting that meets weekly and looks at specific issues; they examine what comes up across the district. He reflected back to when he worked in Boston, they did the same thing and there were challenges for different reasons than the challenges we have in Cambridge.

Ms. Bowman thanked the administration for this document, they always produces a top notch, high caliber budget. Her questions are on 7th and 8th grade math. How will the extra staff support our students across the district? How do we support our gifted learners? The 7th grade math scores are still very alarming, how will the new positions change the math program issue?

Dr. Salim shared his thoughts and will go into greater detail with the math coordinator. It is not just about these two positions; it is also about the existing staff. Like with level up, it is not just about one group of students, it was a wholesale change. They are focusing on the whole upper school grades, there will be different models and it is still about having a pathway for students that demonstrate mastery in algebra. One of the big shifts will be to use Open Up Resources in Math. It looks at the standards in math, building on the assessments of algebra standards earlier. There will be a professional learning piece to support the educators as well.

Ms. Bowman mentioned she is excited with the diversity pipeline we are using. She wants to see the pathways open up. What do we need to do to cultivate diverse professionals from other cities and states? She appreciates the direction we are going in by not letting MCAS scores be the deciding factor for success; it is only a part of it, and not a large part. Success is not just about test scores.

Dr. Salim said there are many levels we can use around actual data. At the school level, spreadsheets help the teams make decisions about learning. We use our benchmark assessments to make decisions around instructional practice. They are forced to make decisions based on the number of request that actually happen.

Mr. Fantini asked if the parent liaisons at the middle schools, will be able to keep their money intact so that they can continue their diversity training. Dr. Salim confirmed it will stay. He also wanted to know about some partners being able to use ASPEN for data sharing and some partners not having access to it. With a second data person, we should be able to do internal evaluations. He also asked that the district include the High School Extension Program in to the equity and access issue. He would like to know what the added value is for educational purposed with the 1:1 initiative.

Salim responded that on a fundamental basic level, the tools is what makes it most important. From a social/economic standpoint, equity is being provided. The access to information is becoming a basic right, it comes with privilege. We don't use typewriters anymore. Being able to give feedback to students, students will need this stuff after high school, it is essential. The use of the tool is only as good as the way it is used by the teacher. It needs to be a collaborative tool, not just a word processing document.

Mr. Fantini asked about diversity at the Kellogg foundation. He suggested partnering with the City of Cambridge's Human Services' after school program would be a good way for us to expand our Grow Your Own Teachers program. Maybe we can partner with Lesley University to restart that program. BU gives 50 full scholarships to students in Boston, we should get at least one. For some reason, we are behind other school systems on using school apps.

Dr. Salim stated perhaps we can strengthen family engagement with progress reports and report cards for parents to support their children at home. Getting some suggestions from families would also be a way to find out how to better connect with families.

Ms. Dexter spoke, as a follow up, on math; students in the 3rd to 5th grades are not passing in math; this is huge. Also, students of color in the 8th grade are under performing, what is the progress report on this problem? Why are we not putting math interventionists in the elementary schools?

Dr. Salim stated there are interventionists at the elementary level and different models exist; no school solely relies on school improvement funds as a resource. We are pulling all of our instructional support coaches together with the math coordinator, and he is confident that this will strengthen the math issue. There will be school during Vacation week at the upper schools. There will be a Saturday session at PAUS that will meet for the next 8 weeks. There will also be additional after school support (math think tank) to look at the gaps and where the students are not succeeding.

Ms. Dexter stated that we are getting about 60 more freshmen, what are we going to do about not bringing on more guidance staff, freshmen students come in bewildered, they really need guidance.

Dr. Salim stated that we have not had an opportunity to process what this will look like in the near term. The report from Ms. Katie Gray will be able to help to solve issues. He mentioned the Workforce Investment Board as a way to compliment what is going on in RSTA and other students that are not in the career pathway. We can also look at how we can continue to see the work in counselors.

Ms. Dexter asked if our teachers are in danger of initiative fatigue. Dr. Salim stressed the importance of doing these initiatives admitting knowing the importance does not make it easy; he also acknowledged the need helps to make the work easier to do. The work around cultural proficiency takes time and is the right work to be doing. This is not unique to Cambridge; it is being faced in schools across the country.

Ms. Nolan wants to know where we are we with universal screening for learning based differences, translations services and advanced learning needs.

Dr. Salim answered that we have a new lead teacher for advanced learners; this has come up a lot of times and seemed the right thing to do.

Ms. Nolan stressed that she wants it to be raised in several different categories and mentioned sending something to Ms. Cohen that assesses brilliant students. Also Independence Ruberts are becoming more popular.

Ms. Kelly spoke mainly on special education regarding expenditures changes which has a decrease of $100,000.00. Please explain where the full time equivalents are.

Dr. Salim stated that they made a major adjustment for the upcoming 2019 budget. They anticipated the out of district costs, and the ASD program got the extra FTEs

Ms. Spinner added that the 100,000.00 reduction was in the general fund. The circuit breaker will help to make this turn out to be a slight reduction. The thirteen FTEs for special ed. are only for the enrollment based.

Bowman noticed that in the budget book, the district wide framework is there but the outcomes and measures are not there. If we are committed to those measures, we need to include them in this document. She also had a question on the Elementary School Review, since we had a Roundtable on it, what are the budget implications.

Dr. Salim summarized regarding instructional time as the big issue as it relates to the Elementary School Review. We have to think about our resources in different ways. We may need to define our positions differently. As to whether it will be on this proposed budget, Dr. Salim does not think so.

Mayor McGovern thanked the Superintendent, the budget co-chairs and Ms. Spinner. He stated it is always easy to see what is not here. Not many districts can add 39 positions. As we move further, it is important to acknowledge that we have not reduced anything. Other districts that are our size are not able to do what this budget does. He also acknowledged that job stability is important.

Ms. Dexter thanked all that participated in this process. If anyone has any technical or specific questions about the budget, they can be submitted to Dr. Salim and Ms. Spinner and they will respond without having to have an extra School Committee meeting.

On a motion by Ms. Dexter, seconded by Mr. Fantini, the meeting adjourned at 8:10 pm.

Dosha E. Beard
Executive Secretary
to the School Committee