

SCHOOL COMMITTEE

(Official Report)

Special Meeting

March 25, 2015

Called for 5:30 PM in the Dr. Henrietta S. Attles Meeting Room, Cambridge Rindge and Latin School, 459 Broadway, Cambridge for the purpose of a public hearing on the FY 15-16 School Committee Budget and for further discussion on the Budget.

Members Present: Ms. Cronin, Mr. Fantini, Mr. Harding, Ms. Kelly, Ms. Nolan, Mr. Osborne, and Mayor Maher

Also Present: Dr. Jeff Young, Superintendent
Dr. Carolyn Turk, Deputy Superintendent
Ms. Maryann MacDonald, Assistant Superintendent for Elementary Schools
Dr. Victoria Greer, Assistant Superintendent for Student Services
Dr. Jessica Huizenga, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum
Mr. James Maloney, Chief Operating Officer
Ms. Claire Spinner, Chief Financial Officer
Ms. Lori Likis, Chief Planning Officer
Ms. Jean Spera, Director of Student Services
Ms. Elaine Koury, Coordinator Visual and Performing Arts
Ms. Terry Gist, CEA President
Mr. Bob Ettinger, Intern

Mayor Maher in the Chair.

A quorum of the School Committee being present, the Chair called the meeting to order at 5:40 PM.

The following individuals were heard re the School Committee FY15-16 Budget:

- Lynn Brown, CSUS 8th grade ELA teacher, adding ELA interventionists
- Betsy Preval, CSUS 7th grade ELA teacher, additional support for upper schools; adding ELA interventionists; funding for training staff in restorative justice practices
- Julie Silvitella, Plymouth St., Cambridgeport parent, advocate for full-time art teacher at Cambridgeport
- Jason Liss, Centre St., Cambridgeport parent, advocate for full-time art teacher at Cambridgeport
- Kelly Dolan, Upland Rd., Graham & Parks parent, budget constraints; spend funds on items most meaningful for students' education; more hands in the classroom; tax dollars should reflect educational priorities
- Cathy Hoffman, Pleasant St., support for restorative justice practices
- Elie Yeralem, Pleasant St., parent of 2 grandchildren in CPS, greater transparency needed in budget and better understanding of what considerations determine the numbers; goals, attrition rate, literacy, information on ethnicity and poverty statistics
- Ben Clark, Centre St., Exec. Dir. of Cambridge Community Services, support for City Links program
- Liz Phipps-Soeiro, Hastings Sq., Cambridgeport librarian and parent of 2 CPS students, splitting of staff time; solving disconnect; create culture of collaboration and support; invited Members to visit schools for a day

- Emily Dexter, Fenno St., need for family liaisons in the upper schools, put 1 FTE World Language teacher in the Baldwin budget; put 2 social worker positions in a school and use city connects model; need more people in schools, e.g. paras, teachers, social workers, etc.

On a motion by Ms. Cronin, seconded by Kelly, it was voted to close public comment at 6:28 p.m.

The Chair thanked all speakers and directed the meeting to a discussion on the budget.

Mr. Fantini asked Ms. Chandra Banks, CPS conflict mediator, to speak on restorative justice practices. Ms. Banks explained that restorative justice practice teaches a person how to implement trainings which she has been instructed in such as Developmental Design, PBIS, Responsive Classrooms and Power Circles. She mentioned that last year she wrote a proposal and submitted it to the Healthy Children's Task Force and sent it to Dr. Turk as well. Her proposal was for her to become the leader of this work from mediation to the training of people. Mr. Harding wanted it to be clear that the Committee did not receive her proposal and he had the understanding that restorative justice fell under her job description as conflict mediator. He inquired about the number of children being impacted or the direct services being provided to teachers. Dr. Turk explained that there are 2 strands of programming. The restorative justice piece is an expansion of Ms. Bank's work on her own over the past 3 years without additional resources. The Mayor noted the time and indicated that we will probably not have resolve on this tonight and it may be referred to the Superintendent. Ms. Kelly asked for clarification on the different parts of the work. Conflict mediation and restorative justice are related but are not the same. Ms. Cronin indicated that it illustrates lack of leadership and lack of a systemic plan to address these issues. Mr. Osborne indicated that we need to address school climate and culture and need to agree on a systematic approach. Dr. Turk reminded us that the multi-tiered system of support which is part of this proposed budget includes an academic and a non-academic side. She spoke of the triangle she recently shared with the Members and the two pieces of the triangle which included cultural competency to be the foundation of all the work that will happen in the 3 tiers of support and the words restorative practice written on the side of the triangle. Ms. Nolan summarized by noting that restorative justice develops a school culture that works for all students. Restorative practices and the tiered intervention fit in with the social emotional learning section of the budget.

Dr. Young asked his administrative team to join him at the table to answer the Members questions, comments and concerns:

- What positions comprise the school-wide social and emotional support teams in the school?
- How would the role of the guidance counselor interact with family engagement plan for that year?
- Are we still following Karen Mapp's recommendations for a family engagement plan?
- Would like a greater description of what the district-wide social worker will be doing and how it will impact social emotional needs of students in our district
- Appreciated diagnostics on math interventionists in the upper schools; would like a similar diagnostic on ELA interventionists in the upper schools
- Concern about MTSS (multi-tiered system of supports for social emotional learning); need a very clear framework of how we are phasing in social and emotional supports
- It has taken us years to implement RTI correctly in some of our schools
- What we currently have in place is not working; it doesn't seem possible that we will be able to implement another tiered level of support next year; have concern for next year and the year after
- Advocate for an outside turnkey organization such as City Connects
- We do not have strong mentoring for our upper school principals
- How does Cambridgeport fit in terms with other schools for Art FTE based on the number of classrooms
- We are lacking an "anchor" for the social emotional support in our schools
- Request more details on the steps planned for social and emotional learning next year. Ms. Spinner will provide.

- Hope that CPS can come up with a district improvement plan before we fill many of these new positions
- Concerned about the reduction to single grade structure at Kennedy/Longfellow
- Glad to see more Kodaly programs added; hope we can create the same for the arts
- World language is an essential part of the future of our school system
- Principals are concerned about losing learning time and focus in the areas of reading, writing and math in grades 3-5 to accommodate world language
- Tool of a longer school day to effectively teach world language is not currently available
- We should have conversation in the next few years on world language
- Think about more instruction time if defined specifically for world language
- It would be helpful to have a world language plan going forward
- Why wasn't a pilot program started in the school that asked for world language. Dr. Young will speak to the principal and respond back.
- What new resources are dedicated to level 3 schools; level 3 schools should have their own area in the budget document
- What is the attrition rate from K to 12. Dr. Huizenga will get data.
- The High School Extension Program (HSEP) is clearly a lifesaver for so many students who are working through some difficult challenges in their lives. These outcomes don't seem like we are meeting the needs of these students. Dr. Turk mentioned that HSEP ensures that students have the skills and knowledge to be able to make their choice to attend a 4 year college. Students are required as seniors to apply to at least 3 colleges, but then it's their choice to attend.
- It's not clear what the real outcomes for HSEP are: quality of the jobs; retention rates at colleges; barriers to success. Dr. Turk will supply information.

The Superintendent cautioned against merely employing an outside agency to make social and emotional learning work. City Connects is not a Tier 1 agency. They serve Tier 2 moving on to the cusp of Tier 3. Social and emotional learning is viewed as a long-term endeavor (3 to 5 years) and CPS is currently exploring partnerships with Harvard Graduate School of Education, City Connects and other agencies.

Mayor Maher noted that although he has respect for the Superintendent and his administrative team, he shares in the level of frustration he heard from some of the Members' comments tonight. When we look at the middle school issue, we have to build confidence in the parent community and teacher community in these upper schools. He applauded that this proposed budget does make strides in addressing some of these issues but he is not fully confident that the concerns are being addressed in the way they should be. He expressed his sense of responsibility as Chair of the Committee when the Innovation Agenda passed noting that it is now the end of year 3. He doesn't feel we are addressing the deficiencies in this program in this proposed budget. He asked the Superintendent to keep in mind in the time between now and the adoption of the budget the things that can further strengthen the needs of the students and teachers in those buildings. The Mayor told of his visit to the Kennedy/Longfellow building and expressed his shame in the physical condition of that building. We need to do an evaluation of what is working with our partners and where our partners are doing a better job than we are doing or supplementing the work that we aren't able to do. The Mayor noted that his comments are not meant to be critical of the school department leadership but to him it appears there is a different sense of urgency. It is his hope that some of those issues can be resolved and addressed.

On a motion by Mr. Harding, seconded by Mr. Osborne, it was voted to adjourn (8:35 pm).

Judith T. Martin
Executive Secretary to the School Committee

Handouts:

Rationale for additional staff and other funding related to budget Initiatives

Summary of teacher budget requests/recommended priorities created by Emily Dexter