APPROVED

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Timberlane Regional School Board
Minutes

PUBLIC HEARING | **Superintendent's Office**
January 27, 2025 | **30 Greenough Road**
7:02 PM | **Plaistow, NH**

Board Members Present
Katie Knutsen, Mark Sherwood, Kim McCormick, Jack Sapia, Donald Woodworth, Alyssa Kowalczyk, Shauna Manthorn

Excused absence: Paul LeCain, Brienna Woodworth

Seated at the Board Table
Justin Krieger, Superintendent
Chris Martin, Director of Operations

Administrators Present
Lucy Canotas, Director of Elementary Education

Mrs. Knutsen opened the Public Hearing and read aloud the ground rules on how the public hearing will be conducted. She explained this hearing is regarding Warrant Article 3. This is a proposed amendment to the Articles of Agreement to include Kindergarten.

Article 3 reads: To see if the school district will vote to amend the Articles of Agreement of the Timberlane Regional School District as follows:

3. Effective July 1, 2027, the Timberlane Regional School District shall be responsible for the public education of pupils in ~~grade 1~~ Kindergarten through grade 12. Pupils in the pre-existing districts shall be assigned by the Regional Board to attend the elementary schools in the pre-existing districts in which they reside for no less than the first five years of formal schooling. Resident parents or guardians may voluntarily request that their elementary student(s) be assigned to another in-district public elementary school on an annual basis as long as seats are available and that no additional costs (transportation, etc.) be incurred by the School District.
The Regional School Board may assign pupils to a school other than one in the pre-existing district in which they reside for the purpose of special education not available in the pre-existing district. Grades 6 through 12 may be maintained in central schools within the Cooperative District.

12. The Timberlane Regional School District shall provide transportation for all pupils ~~grades 1~~ in Kindergarten through grade 12 to the schools within the district, consistent with the provisions of RSA 189:8, except that until the Timberlane Regional Junior-Senior High School is operative, present regulations pertaining to high school transportation shall apply, and any costs to the Regional School District for this transportation shall be charged to the pre-existing district in which the students reside, who incur this expense.

Mrs. McCormick explained some of her justifications for bringing this forward. She sat on the ad hoc committee for Kindergarten and a common theme they were hearing were that a lot of children in half day kindergarten did not receive the same kind of rigor the students in full day receive. The bottom line was if you have an extra $450/month, then your child can get the full day and if they don't have that, then they have to attend half day and that feels really wrong to her. This is the right time. We have the teachers in place, the facilities in place. This is the time we need to change our Articles of Agreement to include full day tuition-free kindergarten.

Mr. Sherwood spoke of the compelling data out there supporting the advantages of full day kindergarten as it pertains to social, economic and scholastic benefits. There are only four other districts in New Hampshire who do not have it. There are financial advantages as well with being able to identify potential challenges that these kids will face throughout their academic careers earlier rather than later.

Mr. Woodworth explained the area he came from had free full day kindergarten and when he moved to Timberlane in 1980, he was shocked he would have to be putting his son through private kindergarten. Personally, what he is looking at is equity and fairness. For about a $300,000 difference in the budget next year, with all things considered, this is a no brainer.

Mr. Sapia stated he was originally against full day kindergarten for a number of reasons, one being the economic conditions around the district and the country. However, listening to the arguments and keeping an open mind, he began to realize the potential savings on the backside of this and also considered the struggles of a student early on. For him, it isn't so much of an equity issue but how we can help children. He believes if the difference is $300,000, then he thinks there are ways of working that out so there is no impact to the taxpayers.

Dr. Martin spoke on the financials and presented a financial exercise they did because it was asked of them to put some dollars to this as an idea. This is a no cost warrant. It is about the Articles of Agreement.

Currently, if they use the current FY25 operating budget as an example, we have 13.5 full time kindergarten teachers at a cost of $1,356,540. Our current transportation contract is $2.7 million. Included in what we refer to as the $20,000 quoted at the last meeting, are facilities, CIP, repairs and maintenance and staff and classroom materials. Those are all inclusive in that number. She

reviewed the loss of current tuition revenue from the FY24 actuals which total $709,238. If they were to bring on full day kindergarten, we would have the additional revenue per student (this is base adequacy) of $2,132.82 per student. In order for us to achieve that, we would need 189 enrollees at a revenue calculation of $403,102.98. The cost of tuition minus the adequacy figure, would result in the cost of full day kindergarten at $306,000 plus.

Mrs. Knutsen opened up the hearing for public comment.

John Downing from Sandown asked what the Budget Committee has to say about this. Mrs. Knutsen explained there is no cost attached to the warrant. Mr. Downing stated that this is a warrant article to start kindergarten next year. Mrs. Knutsen stated this warrant article is just to amend the Articles of Agreement. Mr. Downing wanted to know if this warrant article was circumventing the approval from the Budget Committee.

Dr. Martin explained we will not be starting full day kindergarten in the upcoming fall. The financials would come in the next budgetary cycle.

Mr. Sapia stated there is nothing that states boards and the budget committee have to vote on warrant articles. This goes back as far back as he can remember. There is nothing that says they have to.

Michael Boucher of Atkinson questioned the adequacy aid that was based on 189 students. The district can have a maximum of 300 students. Mr. Krieger said that was correct, however, he said the Department of Education said 189 students would qualify for that adequacy payment moving forward. It is a conservative estimate. Mr. Boucher asked if it would cost the district more if they had 300 students in terms of extracurricular. Mr. Krieger said we would be able to accommodate those students and when we get to 300, there may be an additional staff we would need to look at.

Sheila Lowes of Sandown questioned whether the ad hoc committee worked on the financials in their meetings. She also asked what the state average cost is for a kindergartener in New Hampshire. Mr. Krieger said the average cost in New Hampshire is $18,000 for a kindergartner. We are getting $2,100 per child now either with full time or part time. Mrs. Lowes asked if the $403,000 includes the grant amount. Mr. Krieger said that it does. Mr. Sherwood said they did work on financials.

Mr. Sapia explained the way he looks at it is if they have a few empty seats in a classroom, let's fill them and give the kids the benefit of being there all day long.

Marianne Springer of Danville referred to the school board meeting in December where full day kindergarten was discussed. There was discussion over the need for one additional full time teacher that would be needed but there is no talk of that now and asked why. Dr. Martin explained they used the FY25 budget and FY24 actuals. This is an exercise. Between now and

when we implement full day kindergarten, there may be staffing fluctuations where we can absorb a full time teacher. Mrs. Springer asked do we have any estimate on how many part time kindergartners we have now who would go full time if it wasn't for the cost. Dr. Martin responded she doesn't believe that data exists currently. She explained they provided the public with an exercise with data they are certain of but have not pursued that data. Mrs. Springer said this warrant article is being presented to voters without any indication that it will cost something and we don't know how much. She questioned how big of a problem is it not having tuition free full day kindergarten.

Mrs. McCormick explained they received feedback from a lot of teachers and families who signed up for full day then had to back out due to their financial situation.

Mrs. Springer stated this amendment to the Articles of Agreement will mandate full day kindergarten in Timberlane which is not currently paid for by the taxpayers. She stated the amendment isn't to address the status quo but to go beyond what we are currently doing. Mr. Sherwood stated that was correct. There was a need and a lot of interest in the community for this so we formed an ad hoc committee. The evidence from his perspective is compelling. Mrs. Springer asked why it wouldn't start until 2027. Mr. Sherwood explained it was due to the timing. Dr. Martin explained how they want to give the teachers an opportunity to plan for this new experience and give our administrative staff the opportunity to through and plan for the arrival of the children entering full day kindergarten.

Sheila Lowes of Sandown doesn't understand why it has to wait for 2027. She mentioned in a full class size, there is actually another adult in the classroom with the teacher. Are those paras covered in this? Mr. Krieger said the district currently maintains regular education paras in each of the kindergarten classrooms. Mrs. Lowes said we are already subsidizing kindergarten and preschool without a yes vote and we are already subsidizing full day kindergarten.

John Downing of Sandown asked why they are putting a zero cost article up that will dictate we have to pay for it without knowing the price tag. Mrs. Knutsen explained all this warrant article does is amend the Articles of Agreement. That is all it does. Mr. Downing responded that is a complete lie to say this warrant article won't cost any money.

Michael Boucher of Atkinson explained we will have multiple students every year who are going to be paid for by the district whether or not we agree to it or not because there are state and federal mandates the district must follow. He doesn't understand the confusion the people have.

Sheila Lowes of Sandown asked if this district approved full day kindergarten, are we legally bound to any warrant article that comes after this in any year that pertains to full day kindergarten and monies in need. She asked them to seek legal opinion on that.

Bob Kincaid of Plaistow asked how many districts there are in New Hampshire. Mrs. Knutsen said there are 160 school districts in New Hampshire. Mr. Kincaid asked if anyone has a

breakout of what the impact $307,000 would have on an average home. Mr. Krieger stated they will have that information at the Deliberative Session.

Michael Boucher of Atkinson commented that private full day kindergarten would cost $500 a week. It actually costs the district more to continue this inefficient system.

Mr. Woodworth explained in order to move forward, we had to get this piece done and in doing so, we are able to get our kids where they need to be. Once we do that, there will be a cost savings over time for the work we don't have to do to catch up kids who have been unfortunately put in a situation where they are not having an equal start with their classmates who are able to afford full day right now. We are trying to do the right thing in a way that is most transparent that we can envision. Moving forward, this is the only way we could do it at this point.

Michael Boucher of Atkinson asked Mr. Krieger if we have to charge tuition and is there a number we have to charge legally. Mr. Krieger said we don't have to charge tuition and the tuition is set by the School Board.

Paul Freeman of Danville asked if he is being forced to pay for kindergarten illegally referring to the Articles of Agreement that states grades 1-12. Mr. Sherwood explained the half day kindergarten was a mandate from the State of New Hampshire. It is in place and the structure is there. This is about changing from half day to full day.

Sheila Lowes of Sandown asked if they believe that $6,500 a year pays for one child to be educated in kindergarten full time. Mr. Sherwood said it would not for the first, second, or third child, but once you have 20 in the classroom, it could pay for them due to economy of scale.

There were no further questions or comments from the public.

Mrs. Knutsen reminded everyone of the Deliberative Session on 2/6/25 and closed the public hearing at 8:03 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Linda Mahoney
Recording Secretary

Approved by the School Board on February 20, 2025.