

**Finance Committee
Ford Middle School Library
Acushnet, Massachusetts
Minutes of Meeting
March 23, 2022
7:00**

ATTENDANCE: Chair Michael Boucher, Peter Benoit, Eric Chew, Susan Delgado, Robert Ferreira, and Eric McGlynn

ABSENT: Vice-Chair Robert St. Jean and Jacqueline Stanley

OTHERS PRESENT: David Desroches, Selectman, Jamie Kelley, Interim Town Administrator; Kristen Flynn, School Business Manager, Dr. Paula Bailey, Superintendent; Jennifer Downing, Sarah Gomes, Ronald Houde, Jonathan Teves, School Committee

Mr. Chew made a motion, seconded by Mr. Ferreira, to open the meeting. The **vote** was **unanimous for**.

Ms. Gomes made a motion, seconded by Mr. Houde, to open the School Committee meeting. The **vote** was **unanimous for**.

FY23 Budget hearings

Acushnet School Department

Dr. Boucher advised that tonight the School Department and the School Committee would be presenting their budget. Dr. Bailey began the presentation by advising of their mission statement which is in partnership with all their stakeholders to promote student success, growth, and learning in a safe and supportive environment. She also stated their vision to be a high performing school district where all students are afforded the opportunities to realize their potential and their core values. She advised when she came into the district four years ago the areas that needed attention were alignment, communication, student support, and community.

Dr. Bailey said their budget needs to support the following strategic objectives:

- Achieving academic excellence for all students
- Creating thriving social and emotional learning experiences for all students
- Strengthening partnerships with families and the larger community.

Regarding ELA scores, they have about 50% of children exceeding or meeting expectations. In Math, that number is 42%. They also continue to address pandemic learning loss. They used the following priorities to guide them in their development of their budget.

- Updated, highly-rated and rigorous curriculum
- Enhance curriculum, instruction, and assessment
- Maintain and enhance technology infrastructure and equipment

- Strengthen response to intervention/supporting all learners
- Address pandemic learning loss
- Strengthen social/emotional learning
- Provide impactful professional development
- Maintain reasonable class sizes

Dr. Bailey advised what the budget process had been, and noted that they had put whatever they could into grants. The original increase had been for 5.8%, which was modified to 3%. The preliminary budget is \$15,809,858 with a total increase of \$460,377. This budget maintains level services and continues to address pandemic learning loss. It supports new curriculum and two new full-time positions.

Ms. Flynn then advised that her part of the presentation would be in two parts. The first part is what comprises the FY23 budget. The second part is going to focus on what has changed from last year to this year. Ms. Flynn then went through the six components of their budget. Salaries is the largest component of the budget at \$9,521,389. The total staff is comprised of 152.8 full time equivalency (FTE.) 132.6 FTE are in the operating budget and 20.2 FTE are funded through grants and funds. Ms. Flynn then broke the salaries down further as follows: District leadership and Administration, 4 FTE, \$392,252; Instructional leadership, 14.4 FTE \$1,045,025; classroom teachers, 78.0 FTE, \$5,958,691; therapists, 4.0 FTE, \$299,091; substitute teachers, which includes the building-based subs and the per diem subs. \$262,608

Ms. Flynn said the next group of salaries is paraprofessionals, 21 FTE, \$429,176, Counselors 5.0 FTE, \$384,269, Psychologist 1.0 FTE, \$77,811, Attendance and Residency, \$6,000, and Medical and Health 3.0 FTE, \$199,596. They also have 9 food service employees but they are funded by the school lunch revolving fund. Student Activity Stipends for clubs and intramurals sports, \$21,059 School Security, \$31,100 is their portion of the School Resource Officer and 9.4 FTE, Facilities, Maintenance and Custodial, \$414,711.

Ms. Flynn advised the second largest component of the budget is tuition to other schools for a total of \$3,811,326. They have 17 students at Bristol Aggie, \$146,506, 21 students at New Bedford High School, \$298,559, 225 students at Fairhaven High School, \$2,930,124, and 26 School Choice, \$136,788. The Out of District Tuition is Collaborative, \$600,000. That will be offset by the circuit breaker revenue of \$300,651 they are receiving this year that will carry over to next year. The third largest component of the budget is student services at \$1,065,321 and is comprised of Attendance and Residency, \$1,000, Medical and Health Services, \$3,000, Student Activities, \$6,750, and Transportation, \$1,054,571. Ms. Flynn broke down then transportation cost to Regular Day, \$719,571, Special Education, \$290,440, McKenney-Vento, \$13,000, Late Bus, \$26,000 and Foster, \$5,560.

The fourth component of the budget is instructional services. Ms. Flynn advised this is for all their supplies. The largest items are Curriculum Materials, \$325,173 and Instructional Technology, \$261,800. Other items include: Library Books and Supplies, \$500, Guidance Supplies, \$2,650, ELL Contract Services and Supplies, \$4,750, School Leadership Supplies, \$7,925, Instructional Equipment, \$9,500, Psychological Services and Supplies, \$24,500, General School Supplies, \$36,500, Professional Development, \$47,700, and Therapeutic Services, \$95,000.

The next component was facilities at \$470,506. It was broken down to Custodial Services, \$40,000, Heating of the Buildings, \$155,000, Utilities, \$178,506, and Maintenance, \$97,000. The smallest and final component of the budget was District Administration which was composed of School Committee Expenses, \$14,482, Legal Services, \$56,250, Superintendent Office Expenses, \$37,850, Business Office Expenses, \$11,275, and Administrative Technology, \$5,461.

Ms. Flynn advised the next part of her presentation is looking at those same categories to see what has changed and where is that \$460,377 increase coming from. She then displayed the following breakdown: Salaries, \$336,285, Tuition, \$251,530, Facilities, \$50,706, Instruction, \$26,362, District Administration, \$2,000, Professional Development, \$532, Contract Services (\$884), Transportation (\$206,154.) Ms. Flynn then began breaking down the increases further beginning with Salaries. The increase for Salaries, Contractual was \$202,929. The increase for Salaries, New Positions was \$133,356.

Dr. Bailey stated the two new positions are for a Library Media Specialist at the Elementary School and a District nurse. Regarding the Library Media Specialist, presently they have outdated materials and unused space at the Elementary School. They want to be able to have all students be able to access materials. They believe that by hiring a person and getting that library back up and running it will have a positive impact on student achievement, graduation rates, and achievement for diverse and at-risk populations. Over the last few years, getting these libraries back up and running has been a priority.

In addition, Dr. Bailey said this person would connect with teachers and provide them with additional support materials. The library would be a warm and welcoming environment for students to pursue a love of reading. They would also like to serve the younger populations with a story hour by partnering with the Acushnet Public Library. The library will be a place for project-based learning. It will become a school hub with the goal to enhance literacy among all grade levels as well as to instill a sense of belonging for students who are still feeling the effects of the pandemic. Dr. Bailey then displayed example pictures of what a modern library/media space can look like and how that look has changed over the years.

Dr. Bailey continued that the second position needed is a district nurse. She advised that 40 to 60 students visit the nurse's office daily. There is mandated paperwork that becomes difficult for the nurses to keep up with. The district nurse would float between the two schools and provide screenings, substituting, prepare the mandated paperwork, and parent outreach. They are also on the threshold of needing another nurse based on their numbers. There should be one nurse per 500 students. There are 549 children at the Elementary School and 396 at the Ford Middle School. However, they believe the added nurse would be able to help both schools especially with substituting. There has been a huge shortage of nurses, and they have had great difficulty in securing nurses for coverage and absences.

Ms. Flynn said their next increase was in Instruction for \$26,362. The bulk of that is curriculum materials at \$17,862. The increase in technology of \$12,500 is to update their student's Chromebooks. The Facilities increase of \$50,706 was in utilities for electricity and oil. They were able to use some pandemic funds to address their HVAC systems and make sure that all the components were working properly.

Ms. Flynn stated the next increase was in tuition. There is a decrease in out of district tuition of \$250,670, but increases in High School of \$459,153 and School Choice of \$43,047. The increases are due to more students as well as an assessment from Bristol Aggie for their new buildings. She noted that tuitions for both Fairhaven High and New Bedford High had increased approximately 13 to 14%. They currently did not plan to use the Special Education Stabilization Fund, and there was no prepaid tuition in this budget at this time. The other budget increases were minor at \$1,648. Ms. Flynn then summarized the FY23 Budget with the total of \$15,809,858 broken down as follows: Central Office, \$515,110; Elementary School, \$4,032,676; Middle School, \$3,495,063; Special Education, \$3,107,079; District, \$4,659,930.

Ms. Flynn advised according to the Governor's budget they are scheduled to receive \$6,433,462 in Chapter 70 State Aid. They received the minimum increase of \$30.00 per student for an increase of \$35,760. She summarized the increase of \$460,377 is a 3% increase. The Town's contribution of \$9,376,396 represents 59% of the budget. Dr. Bailey noted that the majority of the increases in the budget are due to fixed costs that they have no control over.

Ms. Flynn said they have also put forth two capital requests. The first is for roof preventative maintenance for \$15,000. They have put in this request for the last several years. They will be repairing a portion of the Elementary School roof that dated back to 1971. They were approved for that funding by the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA), which was paying about 57% of the cost. That work should be starting when school ends in June. There are other sections of the roof that are about 20 years old which don't yet qualify for MSBA funding, but still have to be repaired and maintained.

Ms. Flynn said the other Article they are looking at is \$45,000 for parking lot maintenance. This is for the newer parking lot that was built a few years ago. The topcoat was put on but they never came back to complete the project. She asked if there were any questions. Mr. McGlynn asked regarding the library media specialist position what would the ideal qualifications be for a candidate. She believed that last year when they hired someone, it was mid-range within the steps. He asked if the job had the same requirements as at a public library. Dr. Bailey said she had no idea. He then asked for the salary breakdown for the new positions. Dr. Bailey replied it was \$51,450 for the nurse and \$81,906 for the library media specialist. She thought that might be high, but it was there if they needed it.

Mr. Benoit asked if contract negotiations could affect this year's salaries. Ms. Flynn replied they are currently in contract negotiations for next year. He asked if the numbers in the budget reflected the current cost and not the expected increase. She noted they have accounted for an approximate increase. Mr. Benoit then asked what was the estimate in terms of an increase on salaries that was factored in. Dr. Bailey said they could not answer that as they had no idea and were in negotiations now. Ms. Gomes said they are not allowed to answer that because they are in negotiations but a ball park amount has been factored in. Mr. Kelley noted that it was an unfair labor practice for them to comment or for the Town to comment when negotiations are pending.

Mr. Benoit then asked if it was correct that one expense that is not in this budget are the benefit packages for the school employees. Mr. Kelley said that was correct. Mr. Benoit added that this budget does not reflect the huge increase the Town has for its benefits, as well as the benefits that are going to be required for the new employees. Mr. Kelley agreed that was going to be an

expense. The insurances should be considered a joint account where the schools make up about 62% of the health insurance costs. Mr. Benoit added that when he is looking at what they have for the Town overall without the benefit side of it factored in, the School makes up approximately 46% of their total revenue with this budget alone. If they start factoring in the benefits, it's a huge portion of the overall operating budget out of the entire Town. Dr. Bailey noted that they had done a lot of cutting and what people wanted was a 5.8% increase, and they were able to reduce from that.

The nurse position was then discussed. What would a third nurse do on a full-time basis, and is a part-time basis an option? Are they trying to solve a problem that was the result of a pandemic? Dr. Bailey responded that an agency nurse was much more expensive, and they were not reliable. They also can not keep up with the mandated paperwork and have had to work with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE.) on some of the shortcomings of their nursing program. They also have not been able to get their vision and hearing screenings done. When the nurses are out, they don't have subs. To her, the health and safety comes before anything else in their school district. It was noted that the salary of the nurse in comparison to the library media specialist seemed rather low. The media specialist salary was also higher than the Director of the Acushnet Public Library.

Ms. Delgado asked how long it had been since there was a library technician. It was estimated about four years. Ms. Flynn said prior to that it was a paraprofessional that was overseeing each library. This position is a little different in how they have run libraries in the past. As a media specialist, it requires some of those skills as well. After discussion, Ms. Delgado asked if there could be collaboration with the Town library with this position. Ms. Gomes replied they were welcome to apply for the position, but with 500 children they need a full-time person in the School. Dr. Bailey added this would be for a certified teacher.

Ms. Delgado then asked the following for clarification purposes: if you deduct the \$133,000 for new positions out of the budget; the remaining \$325,000 is to provide level services to the students? Dr. Bailey said the majority of the \$400,000 is coming from fixed costs that are out of their control. After discussion, Ms. Delgado noted that the drop in transportation is offsetting the increase to the tuition fixed cost, so that statement is a little confusing. Ms. Flynn noted that the increases are more than \$460,000 but the overall is offset by those decreases. She advised the only thing she saw that was an increase that is not a fixed cost is the \$26,000 in instructional supplies. However, that is coming from curriculum supplies that are still needed.

Ms. Delgado noted that last year when she applied that same methodology, it was said she was taking services away from the kids and that was not an accurate statement. Ms. Gomes added this year they are coming to them and advising they need these two new positions. They will feel if it's reduced by any way from this 3%, in the view of the School Committee, they will be taking away services because they need these positions. Mr. Benoit said they need to come up with a different way of expressing that. The Committee is not taking away anything if they don't provide the two new people, they are just not providing services the Schools think they deserve. Ms. Delgado said there has been miscommunication, so they need to be careful with the words they are using and make sure they are consistent in their definitions as in the past, this has led to misunderstandings. For her, level services are defined as providing the same level of services, whereas they are defining it as being the services they think the students deserve. She wanted to make sure that distinction is made clear.

Dr. Boucher asked if they anticipated seeing an increase in student achievement by adding the library media specialist in regards to ELA and MCAS scores. Dr. Bailey said that is the goal, but this is a multi-year project.

Mr. Kelley said this operating budget of \$15,809,858 does not include payment on the debt principal or interest, so that will have to be factored into the final amount. He advised when you factor in all of the education costs including Old Colony, you have \$18,199,073. Looking at all of the costs that the Acushnet Public School District do not have control over, it is a total of \$6,394,032 or 35% of the total education budget. It is up to the Committee to make their recommendations but looking at this, he has enough information for the larger budget, with their recommendation to balance the budget.

Mr. Chew said that with Articles the School has put before the Town over the years, has all that money been spent? Ms. Flynn replied that they had conversations with the prior Town Administrator and Accountant over a few of the Articles that could be closed out and returned to the Town that would not be fully expended. There were some, for example, that they have not been able to proceed with because of the pandemic and/or other factors related to them. Dr. Boucher asked if they anticipated continuing to spend 300k +/- for curriculum for the next several years. Dr. Bailey replied probably, as all the new curriculum has digital platforms that come with it. The idea is that it is recommended to do a new adoption every three to four years. They then displayed the adoption cycle.

Dr. Boucher thanked them for their presentation. He advised the Committee would be beginning deliberations next week, and if they had any questions they would reach out. He noted the Finance Committee still had some business to cover so the School Committee could close their meeting now. Mr. Houde made a motion, seconded by Ms. Gomes, to close the School Committee meeting. The vote was **unanimous for**.

The Finance Committee then took a ten-minute recess. Mr. Chew made a motion to reopen the meeting. It was seconded by Mr. Benoit. The vote was **unanimous for**.

Reserve Fund Transfers

1. EMA -- Equipment & Repairs - \$800.00

Dr. Boucher said this is to be used to replace batteries on the Town Board.

Mr. McGlynn made a motion, seconded by Mr. Ferreira, to approve this transfer.

Vote: Mr. Benoit, Ms. Delgado, Mr. Ferreira, Mr. McGlynn, Dr. Boucher-Aye;
Mr. Chew-Abstain

2. Fire Department -- Assessment Center - \$4,880.00

Dr. Boucher said this expenditure was due to some unforeseen circumstances. He had been advised that the funds that are currently in there are already earmarked for something else.

Mr. McGlynn made a motion, seconded by Mr. Chew, to approve this transfer. The **vote** was **unanimous for**.

Meeting Minutes

Mr. Ferreira made a motion, seconded by Mr. Benoit, to approve the Minutes from the February 9, 2022, meeting. The **vote** was **unanimous for**.

Old Business

There was no old business.

New Business

Mr. Kelley advised that of right now they were within \$10,000 of balancing the budget as they have done some cuts.

Next meeting date

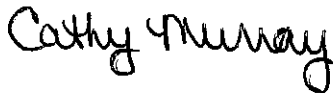
The next meeting date will be March 30, 2022, at 7:00 p.m. Dr. Boucher noted they will begin deliberations at that time. The meeting will be held at Town Hall. After discussion, it was agreed to start the meeting at 6:30 p.m.

Adjourn

Mr. McGlynn then made a motion, seconded by Mr. Chew, to adjourn the meeting. The **vote** was **unanimous for**.

8:52– MEETING ADJOURNED.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Cathy Murray".

Cathy Murray