

Andover School Committee
Regular Meeting of April 15, 2010
School Administration Building - School Committee Room

Members in Attendance: Chair Dennis Forgue, Annie Gilbert, Richard J. Collins, David Birnbach, and Paula Colby-Clements

Others in Attendance: Bernie Tuttle, Interim Business Manager

I. Regular meeting in the School Committee Room

A. Salute to the Flag

Chair Dennis Forgue called the meeting of the School Committee to order at 7:07 P.M. Mr. Collins asked for a moment of silence followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

B. The Budget

Chairman Forgue said the goal of today's meeting will be to define how we intend to close the budget gap of \$1.3M. The four options available are: 1. the preliminary budget number; 2. a higher budget number; 3. a number that would partially close the gap or; 4. a number that will completely close the gap. A lot of input has been received from the community; however, there has not been any communication from the AEA to help alleviate the budget deficit before us, so the decision sits with the School Committee. The School Committee asked the AEA to consider changing the AHS teacher schedule to a 3 x 3 schedule for both semesters; their response was they would be happy to discuss this request when bargaining for a new contract begins. Therefore, this will have no input on the FY-2011 budget.

Mr. Forgue reported that the Town has offered assistance through CIP funds. He suggested the Committee spend time talking about what the target number will be and how they will converge on a number. Dennis will also be meeting with the Finance Chair and the Chair of the Board of Selectmen on Friday to discuss Town Meeting.

Paula Colby-Clements agreed that the Committee needs to first determine a number and then configure where the cuts will be made. Since the biggest problem is the Out-of-District Special Education costs, and she suggests that amount be backed out of the deficit and divided 65/35 by the Town and School; less \$300,000 from the CIP would bring about a new budget number of \$64,246,260 with a remaining deficit of \$600,000. David Birnbach said this is close to the number he arrived at; others agreed with reducing the deficit an additional \$700,000 leaving a \$600,000 deficit and dialogued on areas to cut.

Chairman Forgue said realistically they may have to reduce the level services budget; the Town will not help the School Department unless we give more. If not, he would support this number going to Town Meeting. Paula said the Committee is diligently trying to work with all the boards, and before voting a number they should present a budget number to the other Boards and come to a consensus. Annie Gilbert expressed frustration with the Administration on providing other ideas/areas that could be looked at for savings. After further discussion, the School Committee unanimously agreed to a further reduction of \$700,000.

Bernie Tuttle explained that implementing a 3 x 3 teaching schedule at the High School would reduce the deficit but should they go to arbitration and lost, it would be financially costly. If the Committee wants to reduce staff at the high school he suggests converting to a 5 x 7 block. A system-wide

reduction of 12 FTE's would equate to the \$700,000 in cuts; although you would have to add in the cost of additional textbooks for the high school if the block schedule is switched to a 5 x 7 schedule. Annie Gilbert asked if the textbooks could be covered through the CIP School 1, 2, or 3. Mr. Tuttle said it could. Dennis Forgue stated that according to Dr. Bach, the ability of the high school to adapt their scheduling looks good, and if the AEA were open to negotiating a 3 x 3 teaching schedule there is flexibility to re-work that. Mr. Collins supports a 3 x 3 teaching schedule with other personnel covering duties at a lesser rate; although it would have to be bargained. The other option to consider would be for teachers to agree to take three furlough days (two teacher workshop days at the beginning of the school year and one at the end) which would result in approximately \$660,000 in savings.

David Birnbach cannot support a 5 x 7 schedule at any cost and suggests increasing the class size at the elementary level and at the high school level, resulting in a savings through the reduction of a total of 12 teachers. Bernie Tuttle suggested the Committee consider a "not to exceed" number for the high school classrooms and to consider the size of the classrooms.

The Committee reviewed the options on the table (5 x 7 schedule at AHS or 3 x 3 teaching schedule, and increasing class size at the elementary level). The Committee would like to bring undersized class sections at the elementary level up to the School Committee mid-point policy number. Dennis Forgue said the impact, as previously reported by Mr. Tuttle, of the elimination of Foreign Language in Grade 6 at the middle schools would realize approximately \$210,000 in savings, and the cost of hiring monitors about \$40,000. Paula suggested reducing or eliminating \$230,000 in Professional Development funds.

Chairman Forgue said the School Committee is open to dialoguing with the AEA on options, if they would consider opening the contract. Annie Gilbert talked about the IDEA funds and if it is possible to use \$700,000 of that money; she understands the money has to be used for Special Education expenses. She believes technology provides better access to learning for special needs students and asked if we could use the remaining dollars in technology from the CIP towards the deficit, and use the IDEA funds for technology. Mr. Tuttle said we could absolutely do that.

Chairman Forgue said the Committee seems to have reached consensus on arriving at the \$700,000 through the reduction in the workforce of twelve teachers by increasing class size at the high school and elementary school levels without cutting programs.

Bernie Tuttle congratulated the Committee on their decisions but said the work is not done. The School Department budget is still \$600,000 above the Town Manager's recommended budget.. Chairman Forgue said the budget conversation would be continued at the Triboard meeting on Thursday, and he will be meeting with the Chairs of the Finance Committee and Board of Selectmen on Friday to further discuss the budget deficit. The School Committee will have a final meeting before Town Meeting.

Comments from the Audience

Diane Costagliola said switching to a 5 x 7 will offer fewer course selections for students at AHS; should the Committee decide to make this change, it is essential for the students that the change be made before the end of the school year.

Dan Kowalski asked if they could mitigate the increase in class size at the elementary level by increasing the time of the instructional assistants.

Bob Willard suggests the School Department save \$800,000 by eliminating athletics, music, drama, etc at the high school similar to what Mansfield, Massachusetts instituted.

Peggy Kruse clarified that the elementary class sizes were not necessarily being raised, but undersized grade levels were being adjusted to the midpoint of the current School Committee Policy.

Cindy Webber feels that targeting areas relative to School Committee Policy is a wise move, it keeps classes even. However, she stressed the need to have balanced equity across all levels. The Committee should investigate what changes could be made at the middle school level that would yield FTE's. She also does not want to see the students at AHS used as pawns.

Annie Gilbert replied that the team model is highly valued at the middle schools. David Birnbach suggested a mini-redistricting across the middle school lines to increase parity at Wood Hill Middle and capture a few FTE's there.

II. Adjournment

At 8:45 P.M. on a motion by Annie Gilbert with a second by Paula Colby-Clements, the Committee unanimously voted to adjourn

Respectfully submitted,

Dee DeLorenzo

Dee DeLorenzo, Recorder