

Andover School Committee
Regular Meeting of April 29, 2014
School Administration Building - School Committee Room

Members in Attendance: Annie Gilbert, Paula Colby-Clements, Barbara L'Italien, David Birnbach, and Joel Blumstein

Others in Attendance: Dr. Marinel McGrath, Superintendent, Paul Szymanski, Assistant Superintendent Finance and Administration, and Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum & Instruction, Nancy A. Duclos.

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:04 P.M. by Annie Gilbert followed by a moment of silence and the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. Regular Meeting

Chairman Gilbert said the purpose of tonight's meeting is for the School Committee to discuss and possibly vote on the School Department budget for FY-15. She reported that at Monday night's Board of Selectmen there was an update on the expense and revenue accounts and a report on Health Insurance from Ken Lombardi, Insurance Consultant for the Town. Two bids were received for Town/School Health Insurance; one from Tufts and the other BC/BS through MIAA. The Public Employee Committee (PEC) representing the Town and School Bargaining Units voted today to stay with BC/BS through MIAA Health Care Trust; therefore the health care assumption will not change. The Town's Finance Director, Donna Walsh, reported there were no changes in the revenue and expenses accounts that would affect the bottom line, and Selectman Kowalski made a motion to add \$200,000 to the School Department Budget from the tax base but the motion failed. Therefore there will be no additional funds coming from the Town for the school budget.

Paul Szymanski reported on the Transportation bids received for regular and special education bussing. The lowest most responsible bids received are as follows: Trombly Bus Company,-Athletics, In-Town Field Trips and Kindergarten; North Reading Transportation-Special Education In-Town and Out of District, School Year and summer, and regular education school year. The favorable bids received for Regular Education Bussing resulted in a projected favorable balance of \$124,000 in the non-salary general fund regular education account #331. Special Education transportation dollars will stay as is in account number 332.

A recap of the status of the School Committee Budget from March 5th through April 10th was reviewed showing the initial preliminary budget number of \$72,185,784 as of March 5th reduced to \$70,904,452 on April 10th and thus in line with the Town Manager's recommend budget number for FY-15. Reductions of \$1,133,558 to meet the Town Manager's recommended budget were attained by decreasing 47.47 FTE's, new leave of absences, retirements, reduction of special education summer salaries and track change reductions, removal of the Elementary Digital Learning Specialist position, and reducing the expense budget by \$174,774.

The Committee talked about how to best use the \$124,000 in savings from the transportation bids. Realizing the aggressive reduction in the Instructional Assistant positions but also the need to further the Strategic Plan, the Leadership Team feels they can manage with the reduction in Instructional Assistants.

The Strategic Plan priority would be to add an additional Digital Learning Specialist or a fifth day of World Language at the Middle Schools.

The School Committee discussed the need to improve the budget process, their opinions on the reduction of the Instructional Assistants, and the Strategic Plan Investments. The School Committee votes on a budget number only.

Questions and statements from the audience highlighted the concern about the loss of the Instructional Assistants and the affect it will have on the delivery of educational learning to students, especially students on IEP's and in special education programs. There is also concern for the safety of children in the playground and lunch rooms without proper supervision. The lack of communication from the School Committee and School Administration to parents on the budget process and reductions is disappointing. It is late in the process now to formulate a plan to address the reductions at Town Meeting. The budget process is flawed and the statement in the Finance Committee Book about the lack of transparency is incorrect and unacceptable. There will be ramifications in the schools with the loss of instructional assistants especially at the elementary level. It was noted that many of the IA's are Andover residents.

After further deliberations on the reductions and the budget, Annie Gilbert polled the School Committee to see if they were ready to vote a budget number tonight or wait until Thursday night. The \$124,000 in additional funds does not have to be appropriated now but should be allocated by Town Meeting.

Barbara L'Italien motioned that the Andover School Committee vote to adopt and approve the FY-15 Operating Budget for the Andover Public Schools at \$70,904,452.00. The motion was seconded by David Birnbach and voted 4-1 to approve. Joel Blumstein opposed.

The School Committee continued to discuss use of the \$124000 and whether or not to apply it to restoring Instructional Assistant positions or to adding a Digital Learning Specialist. Superintendent McGrath said the other alternative would be to cut \$900,000 from the core program to meet the budget gap.

The members were not in total agreement on the best way to utilize the funds but realized the importance of moving forward with Strategic Plan Investments. The School Committee were asked to voice their decision on using the \$124,000 for a Digital Learning Specialist and replied as follows: Annie Gilbert – agreed, Paula Colby- Clements-agreed, David Birnbach-agreed, Barbara L'Italien- disagrees, and Joel Blumstein accepts the recommendation.

III. Adjournment

At 8:58 P.M. Paula Colby-Clements motioned the Andover School Committee adjourn the meeting of April 29, 2014. The motion was seconded by Barbara L'Italien and voted 5-0 to approve.

Respectfully submitted,

Dee DeLorenzo

Recording Secretary

Documents: FY-15 Budget Summary and Reductions