

Wakefield Budget Committee Meeting
with the school
held in the Paul School Library
November 20, 2023
Approved

Members present: Jerry O'Connor, Tom Daniels, Priscilla Colbath, Denny Miller, Howie Knight, Bob Ouellette, Dave Mankus, Peter Kasprzyk, Josh Fuller and Mark Taliaferro.

School Administration and Board members: Superintendent Anne Kebler and Business Administrator Frank Markiewicz, Michele Lambert, Robert DeColfmacker, Sandra Taliaferro

Public present: Norma DiRocco, Sara Fenton, Randie Fox, Caitlin Gelinas, Meghan DeColfmacker, Sheena Robinson, Mary Soares with Clearview Community TV

Mr. O'Connor opened up the Budget Committee meeting at 6:30 to review the school's proposed 2024-2025 Operating budget and led those present in the flag salute.

Mr. Miller commented on the number of parents and teachers in the audience and said he was happy they were present.

1100 Regular Education:

Mr. O'Connor began the discussion with the 1100 Regular Education. Mrs. Colbath read the following:

I'd like to add money to the 1100 function, Line 51140 Support Staff in hopes that the School Board will decide to keep a position that has previously been funded by ESSER money and that was voted down by the Board 2-2 with one not voting because of his relationship to the person who now holds the position.

This position is Behavior Interventionist. This is a place where children can go for 5 to 10 minutes and talk to someone to prepare them to go back to their classroom and continue to learn without being disruptive. I watched an excellent presentation given by numerous staff members, probably the best I've seen, stating factual information in an easy to understand format, that convinced me, many parents and community members that this position was essential to our students.

Anne has put together one of the best teams this school has seen in years. The administration has begged the Board to keep this position. Times have changed and children deal with a lot more than we ever had to deal with. They need support. I'm asking for the Board to consider the will of the people and reinstate the position.

Mrs. Colbath made a motion, seconded by Mr. Ouellette, to add \$41,416 for salary and benefits to the 1100 function.

Mr. Ouellette told the committee that at a previous meeting they had received misinformation and not all the correct information they needed to make an informed decision but voted on the position anyway. At the last meeting they voted to reconsider that vote after the planned

presentation that night, with a vote of 3-2. They watched the presentation along with an audience filled with parents. He agreed that it was one of the best presentations he has witnessed. He said they explained why the position was needed and the impact it has on children. He is in favor of keeping this position which has an impact of less than one half a cent on our taxes and an even larger impact if we don't keep it.

A conversation ensued. Mr. Kasprzyk said there are 153 teachers and 430 students an 11 to 1 ratio of teachers to students. He asked if this person is professionally trained for this position. Mr. Taliaferro said it says non certified. Mrs. Kebler said there is no certification for Behavior Interventionist and the person who now holds this position has seven years experience. Mr. Kasprzyk said we have more than enough adults in the school to consult with the children without adding money to the budget. He said he has sat on the Committee for a number of years and has heard tales that if we throw more money at the system it will improve. He said we rank 219th out of 233 schools. Mrs. Colbath said that the numbers that rank our school are a snapshot in time. She said she attended an AREA meeting in Rochester and they were shown a graph that our students were doing as well if not better than Rochester students. She said we always have at least one person in the top ten of the graduating class. This year we had two and we've had as many as five.

Mr. Kasprzyk said we are below 50% in math and reading and science. He said he's heard every excuse. Mr. Ouellette told Mr. Kasprzyk that he's been on the board for eleven years and has seen superintendent after superintendent, after principal after principal come and go. He feels we now have the best administration, teachers, staff and paras, bus drivers. The janitors are all new, tech director, facilities manager. There are many new people and he feels we are finally on the right track. But if we don't support this school we are never going to get where you want to be.

Mr. Taliaferro asked how many counselors and support staff do we have. Mrs. Kebler answered that we have two Guidance Counselors, a Social Worker who functions as a Family Liaison. We have contracted two psychologists. Mr. Taliaferro said way more than the state recommends. Mrs. Kebler said no, the state recommendations for Guidance Counselors are one for 250 students. Mr. Taliaferro said you also have support staff with that so we have an adequate number. He said he agrees with Mr. Kasprzyk, you can't just keep throwing money at it. He said he'd rather take that money and give some teachers raises rather than that position.

Mr. Miller said prior to Covid we didn't have these positions and they weren't in the budget. We hired five positions using covid money. He said every time we get a grant and the grant runs out we hire that individual. Covid is gone and we still want to keep these five people. If we didn't need them before Covid and Covid is gone why do we need them now. Mrs. Kebler said Covid is gone but explained that covid impacted education like we've never seen before. It's different now than it's been in her 40 years. The covid epidemic has produced a carryover. She said there

is a national crisis in mental health right now. We also had a learning loss. We were able to hire a reading and math interventionist this year. We were not able to hire them for the past two years. We have three subgroups that we need to address, the special ed population, economically disadvantages population and a different race of students that did poorly on the standardized tests. We are actually working with the state to come up with a plan for those sub groups. The testing for the other students is good with higher proficiencies.

Covid money was also intended to be a bridge to help us create systems that would address the changes in education. She said she is very happy with all her staff. She had asked that they please be careful with all their budgeting because we were aware that we'd be looking at some costs this year.

She feels there is another consideration, SAU 101 has been through so many transitions in the last six years and we now are feeling that we can move forward, She said she has the best Leadership Team she's seen in the entire twelve years she's been with Wakefield. We can finally look at putting in place what was recommended by the Withdrawal Committee. We still have a lot to do with the finance department. The Behavioral Health Team has significantly reduced the things that were being put on the principal and assistant principal in terms of dealing with the mental health crisis.

Mr. Daniels said this is a \$300,000 decision. We're taking five positions that were funded through ESSER. He agreed that the presentation was phenomenal. He said he would like to see the presentation again and see the data in a little more detail. He is wondering what the data showed three or four years ago and is it truly a trend we can build on. It's a big number.

Mr. Miller said we have never added five new positions in one year. Mrs. Colbath said all these positions aren't new. We've had two guidance counselors and interventionists. Mr. Miller said they were paid for through ESSER. Mrs. Colbath said before that they were being paid for by the taxpayers. Mr. Miller said he would like to see the presentation. He said they have heard all kinds of promises of what's going to happen and it hasn't. He said we have thrown money at it time and time again and haven't seen results. He'd like to be convinced that we're going down the right track. Mr. Kasprzyk asked why are we throwing money up front of progress.

Mr. Fuller asked how many students we have. Mrs. Kebler said this year we have 430 and last year there were 460. Mr. Taliaferro said the quarter of a million dollars for these positions are just payroll and doesn't include benefits. Mr. Markiewicz said that figure represents salaries and also all their benefits. Mrs. Kebler said we have been unable to replace the Reading Specialist, a long time position and our Math Specialist is retiring. Mrs. Kebler said the goal was to retain the Reading Specialist and the Math Specialist. The Math Interventionist and Reading Interventionist

that were funded through ESSER funds are regular education certified teachers who specifically focus on Math and Reading Interventions.

Mr. Kasprzyk said you are asking to bring a non-certified person into a position talking about a mental health situation with children. Mrs. Kebler said that's not correct. She is not doing counseling and there is no certification at the DOE level for behavior interventionist. It doesn't exist. The current person in that position has seven years' experience working in a Student Support Center. They support kids in their behavioral needs. They are not doing counseling. Mr. Miller asked how many teachers did we have pre ESSER? Presently you show 44. How many did we have in 2019 and in 2020?

Mr. Mankus said it appears that some kids progressed at their level but some fell behind during Covid a year to two years. He asked if these specialists would have an effect on these kids. Mrs. Kebler said those specialists will directly impact those kids. Mr. Miller asked if Mrs. Kebler felt there would be a sunset time when these specialists would no longer be needed. She said she would hope that would happen but can't answer that. She said that our kids that are really struggling are economically disadvantaged and students with disabilities. And that's not ok. We know what remote learning was like for these sub groups.

Mr. O'Connor asked if the members wanted to vote. Mr. Miller said he was going to abstain and thought the motion should be withdrawn as he doesn't have enough information. He said we can revote later if we do decide to vote tonight. Mrs. Colbath did not rescind her motion.

(Vote 3-3-4)

Members wanted to see the Behavioral Health Team presentation that was given to the Board. It was agreed that the vote could be revisited after the members viewed the presentation and supporting materials. The presentation will be sent to the members.

Answering Mr. Knight's question about encumbering ESSER funds, Mr. Markiewicz said grants have a closing date and money can't be encumbered. The high school tuition rate in the budget is current. Mr. Daniels asked about the increase in the Staff Stipend line. Mrs. Kebler said this is in their CBA's. We were able to pay this out of ESSER funds for the last two years. The first year the cost was \$50,000 and last year around \$30,000.

Mr. Miller asked about the increase in the textbook line. Mrs. Kebler said it is to update Math in Focus. The software is our student information system (ALMA) that we used this year is actually less expensive than what we used last year. Mr. Kasprzyk asked about high school drop out numbers and how do you keep track of that number. Mrs. Kebler said Rochester's drop out rate includes our kids. There are three sets of eyes that look at the bills to make sure they are residents and are still in the student information system. We have caught some that are no longer registered and have received refunds. She said she was happy to see a graph and hear that Paul

School kids were performing as well if not better than Rochester kids. Mrs. Kebler said we have five students, K-12 that are out of district placements.

1200 Special Education:

Mr. Daniels asked about the 3% increase in Special Ed Support. Mr. Markiewicz said that could be because a para left and we hired someone with more seniority or experience so they are higher on the pay scale. Mr. Daniels asked why there was a decrease in Special Ed Contracted Services. Mrs. Kebler said we have put one of our school psychologists into the IDEA grant in an effort to lower operating budget costs. IDEA is a sustainable grant and if the money isn't spent it rolls over into the next year so we have this year's grant and last year's grant to spend. We are also paying 30% of our Partner Program out of IDEA. This is the fourth year the Partner Program has been in place and we've saved paying for at least four out of district placements. The Title 1 grant is also sustainable.

Mr. O'Connor asked if they use the Trust Fund money to cover out of district placements. Mrs. Kebler said it's for an unanticipated emergency.

Mr. Daniels made a motion, seconded by Mr. Miller, to move the function 1200 at \$2,422,947 (Vote 10-0)

Mr. Daniels made a motion, seconded by Mr. Miller, to move the function 1410 at \$52,412 (Vote 10-0)

Mr. Daniels made a motion, seconded by Mr. Ouellette, to move the function 1420 at \$24,498

Mr. Knight asked if the school coordinated with Parks and Rec. Mrs. Kebler said they did. Mr. Miller asked about the status of the floor. Mr. Markiewicz said the floor is safe to use. We're in discussions with the attorneys. Mr. Fuller asked if the contractor who did the floor insured. Mr. Markiewicz said yes, for \$25,000 and the cost of the floor was around \$110,000.

He said the state of New Hampshire requires anything over \$100,000 of public money being used requires a performance bond. He said as a BA for fifteen years any contract that goes out on his watch would have a performance bond. Mr. Kasprzyk asked if the district had a policy to cover this situation. Mr. Markiewicz said Primex doesn't offer that coverage. **(Vote 10-0)**

Mr. Miller made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Colbath, to move the function 1430 at \$4. (Vote 10-0)

Mr. Miller made a motion, seconded by Mr. Knight, to move the function 2110 at \$3. (Vote 10-0)

Mr. Knight asked about the increase in support staff. Mrs. Kebler said they have always had a split between guidance and special ed and last year it was all put under special ed.

Mrs. Colbath made a motion, seconded by Mr. Daniels, to move the function 2120 at \$241,283 (Vote 10-0)

Mrs. Kebler said this includes the LNA position which was always half time and half time para but she spent most of her time in the nurses office. The nurse has been asking for this position to be full time well before ESSER. **Mr. Ouellette made a motion, seconded by Mr. Taliaferro, to move the function 2130 at \$ 154,316. (Vote 10-0)**

Mr. Daniels made a motion, seconded by Mr. Miller, to move the function 2210 at \$55,000 (Vote 10-0)

Mr. Daniels made a motion, seconded by Mr. Kasprzyk, to move the function 2220 at \$101.697. (Vote 10-0) The increase is due to a new position change.

There is an increase in the auditing line. Every two years the district has to do an actuarial audit. There is also a cost to the district because we are now paying for background checks for volunteers.

Mr. Daniels made a motion, seconded by Mr. Miller, to move the function 2310 at \$69,731. (Vote 10-0)

One position was allocated to the finance department and the BA was changed to full time. Mrs. Kebler said we have been advertising for a long time for a full time BA. We're now advertising SchoolSpring. Mr. Markiewicz said they're just not out there and geographically it's challenging. The DOE has dropped the requirement for BA and are allowing school districts to hire Financial Managers,

Mr. Miller made a motion, seconded by Mr. Ouellette, to move the function 2320 at \$347,275. (Vote 10-0)

Mr. Daniels made a motion, seconded by Mr. Miller to move the function 2410 at \$374,786. (Vote 10-0)

Mr. Daniels asked about the difference in the amount of the increase in the position that was changed from 2320 to this function from \$42,000 and this is up \$53,000. Mr. Markiewicz said it was because there is a new person in that position now. Mr. Daniels asked why the increase in retirement. Mr. Markiewicz said the increase is for a full time BA.

Mr. Knight made a motion, seconded by Mr. Taliferro, to move the function 2510 at \$362,707. (Vote 10-0)

Mr. Markiewicz said Mrs. Lambert has been having some issues with the accounting system. The numbers are correct but some of the percentages are incorrect. Mr. Kasprzyk asked if they thought about starting a capital reserve for the basketball floor. Mr. Markiewicz said that's a discussion the Board will have. Mr. Markiewicz will talk with Brad about why the Care of Buildings and Maintenance is down.

Mr. Kasprzyk suggested a water wheel irrigation system for watering the field as you're spending \$11,550 on water. Mr. Daniels asked why fiber optics (line 55310) was not in technology. He said there's a 165% increase. Mr. Markiewicz will find out. Mrs. Kebler said for the past two years they have been covered under ESSER. Mr. Ouellette said there's a \$4,500 savings in the furniture line. We have plenty stored that we can use.

Function 2610 for \$712, 631 was tabled.

Mr. Daniels asked if we've ever had a full time transportation manager. Mrs. Peaslee was a full time transportation manager a few years ago. Mr. Daniels asked if this was a need or a want. Mrs. Kebler said the manager has taken on dispatching so we don't have to employ a dispatcher which we were paying out of a different line. She is also mechanically very good so she's done a significant amount of maintenance on our buses. Mr. Kasprzyk asked why the increase in bus maintenance. Mrs. Kebler said buses went with minimal maintenance for at least three years so as a result there has been significant maintenance needed. Mr. Kasprzyk asked about rotation. He said having them at the highway barn jump starts and light bulbs were taken care of. He said moving them to the school is costing us an extra \$30,000.

Mr. Miller said during covid we didn't use the buses as we normally do and they sat and the progression lapsed. Mr. Daniels also said in 2021-22 they didn't buy a bus and only put enough in a warrant article for half a bus. Mr. Ouellette said the Transportation Manager's salary was \$28,000 and she got a stipend for \$18,000. The School Board decided to end stipends and now it's in her salary. Her salary is actually \$46,000 and has been \$46,000. The line looks like a 64% increase but the total amount hasn't changed. The stipend came out of drivers salaries. The reason there is no decrease in that line is because we added a part time driver. Mr. Miller asked if Mrs. Kebler or the School Board recommended an additional driver. Mrs. Colbath said that the Transportation director said she only wanted to hire full time drivers and thought they'd be fine. Mrs. Peaslee made that motion to add a part time driver.

Mr. Knight made a motion, seconded by Mr. Miller, to move the function 2721 at \$491,258 (Vote 9-1)

Mr. Daniels made a motion, seconded by Mr. Ouellette, to move the function 2722 at \$120,769.

Mrs. Kebler said the Transportation Manager has advertised and received applications for non CDL drivers and is in the process of taking back connected services with the exception of \$15,000 which is a student with a particular need. **(Vote 10-0)**

Mr. Daniels made a motion, seconded by Mr. Miller, to move the function 2724 at \$5,383. (Vote 10-0)

Mr. Daniels made a motion, seconded by Mr. Miller, to move the function 2725 at \$5,211. (Vote 10-0)

Mr. Miller asked about the increase in supplies. Mr. Markiewicz said that amount was part of the contracted serve contract. Now we will be paying for supplies. Mr. Miller asked if it was cheaper to have contracted services and Mr. Markiewicz said absolutely not.

Mr. Knight made a motion, seconded by Mr. Miller, to move the function 2820 at \$162,768. (Vote 10-0)

Mr. Markiewicz explained that there is a pool of money for the twenty seven unaffiliated workers, bus drivers, secretaries, custodians, administrators, anyone not in a CBA. This will give all twenty seven a 5% COLA. Mr. Kasprzyk said he would like to see that number lowered to 3.8%.

Mr. Daniels made a motion, seconded by Mr. Miller to move the function 2900 at \$114, 466 (Vote 9-1)

Mr. Miller made a motion, seconded by Mr. Daniels, to adjourn the meeting at 8:30 p.m. (Vote 10-0)

Respectfully submitted for approval at the next Budget Committee meeting,

Priscilla Colbath,
Secretary **Pro Temp**