

Concord Public Schools
and
Concord-Carlisle Regional School District
Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC)
Minutes

Wednesday February 12, 2020

7:00-9:00

Concord-Carlisle High School

Library Learning Commons

www.concordsepac.org

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1. Open Meeting at 7 p.m.
2. Public comments
3. Approval of minutes Board Meeting 01/23/2020 moved to March 26th meeting
4. Approval of minutes Special Board Meeting 01/30/2020 moved to March 26th meeting
5. Budget and Warrant Articles
 - Dr. Laurie Hunter, Superintendent
 - Ms. Ruth Grube, Director of Student Services
 - Ms. Cynthia Rainey, Joint School Committee Member

Quotes from Dr. Hunter:

We use a zero-based budget, which is a highly informed budget based on feedback and review. We've done so much work for special education. We brought in a budget under the Concord finance committee's guidelines. We're able to combine a lowering of costs. The Student Opportunity Act hasn't affected anything yet. We're done with the budget after the funding is available.

We're really in a solid place right now.

Revenue has been beneficial. We're only allowed 5% of E&D. (Excess and Deficiency Fund or cash flow)

The school asked for what we needed. Carlisle numbers went down because enrollment went down. Concord enrollment went up while Carlisle enrollment went down.

Highlights:

Special Ed:

Our revenue decreased because we're able to keep more in district. We are keeping kids in the district because it is the right thing for the child. It is the right thing for the entire population.

Outflow for 18-22 Ripley

We are including busses. We're replenishing the fleet. Electric busses will be subsidized so they can be replaced. 3/4 of busses. They will reimburse 75%.

The Student Regional Act: Chapter 70. Special Ed transportation will be reimbursed. It will start with 25% and move up to 100%. This will be our biggest benefit.

The state is meeting with all providers of Special Ed transportation and working with them. This will be a straight reimbursement to the district. The structure won't change.

Tuition was a big cost, but the transportation cost was just behind the tuition.

We have replenished the circuit breaker fund. We had been using it as a cash flow.

FY20 budget wanted to cut the budget in half. They stabilized the flow. Circuit breaker is stable now. We're allowed to carry over the amounts from year to year.

Circuit breaker is the state budget reimbursement for out of district placement.

45K or lower annually, the state will pay 75% of the difference above 45K. That amount goes back into the district.

OPEB: Post-Retirement benefits. Formulas are tighter. We're waiting to see if the state is going to regulate it. We had been aggressive and lived to the formula dollar to dollar. We have a really healthy account. We needed a little less than we had anticipated.

Moody cared more about circuit breaker to be stabilized than OPEB.

We have a good balance for OPEB liabilities. We are putting .5 million dollars there. OPEB is stabilized. Carlisle hasn't been as aggressive about it.

Last year felt really different. The debt for the CCHS building budget is on the down slope.

We added a team chair at the high school. Having an administrator to run programs helps. We have a team chair at the middle school. The communication has improved a lot. For rising 6th and rising 9th graders, things have improved a lot. Jared works with the Carlisle district. Structures are getting put in place. We're more efficient and effective.

K-8 Budget

We worked with principals and Janet at the preschool and Ms. Grube.

Things that drove us:

We're building programs.

We're building strands of programming including social emotional programs.

Programs for Autistic and Developmental Delays are separated and are now soaring. We're seeing stabilization. Our biggest challenge is when emotional behaviors are included in the profile. There are success stories there. Seeing disabled kids become part of the fabric of the schools is amazing to see.

Ruth: The presentation of children is different from the past 10 years. We're training staff to help them with these kids.

Laurie: Teachers are asking for more resources. It is effective when teachers are craving that. We have BCBA support

Ruth: we have a k-5 program and a 6-12 program. We have a space, we're figuring out how to switch the language. The BCBA comes in to do a FBA (functional behavior assessment). If a child is being pulled out, we'd rather have the help pushed in because the transitions are difficult.

Parent: Is Concord taking a Behaviorist approach?

Laurie: no we are not. It is softer, unless a student warrants it. Behaviorist approach is here and Collaborative Proactive Solutions is here. We're doing a more CPS approach.

Ruth: We want to see what is motivating the behavior. It is a holistic approach with a collaborative approach.

Parent: If a kid is acting out, I see it as a result of lagging skills. What are the lagging skills?

PBIS? It is a different training than BCBA training. CPS takes in the neurological differences and environment and relationships. It requires more training.

Laurie: They are supported with counsellors. They are trying to understand why kids are how they are and trying to carry through. These programs are heavily staffed with psychologists and counsellors.

Ruth: There is no overarching program that we are working with, but we are working on the knowledge of all teachers and staff to establish a baseline. PBIS is a huge commitment. Adding too much to staff members plates is a lot.

Cynthia Rainey: Most kids aren't just seeking attention.

Laurie: We hired experienced people to build these programs. They are building communities of support staff to support individualized plans for each.

Parent: CPS is a radical sense change that comes from the top.

Laurie: None of the programs are prescriptive.

Parent: Are schools being served after transitions?

Laurie: We're trying to focus on vertical alignment.

Ruth: Laura the team chair is involved in the transition of all 5th graders when they move up. Jared is doing the same thing for kids moving up to 9th grade. A mom and dad or guardian for these students moving up has the schedule. We're helping parents understand the new alignment.

Parent: Is horizontal alignment part of the structure?

Laurie: It is there. The vertical is the part that we need to work on.

Ruth: The staff is working to get pre-K to work with the high school teachers.

Laurie: Principals are communicating more now than ever.

Parent: Transparency is important. When we get to the social emotional piece, I don't hear that weight attached to the importance of teaching this piece. I'm hearing that the programs

are still developing. This is our more vulnerable population, so it worries me. Are we going to hear about the training?

Ruth: We follow the CACEL program. There are assessment tools on the website. It is state driven. The Alcott program has 4 students in it. They have it woven into their every class all day. Theoretically, we're building the plane as it is flying. They need more specialized education in a smaller classroom. They need the curriculum woven into the classroom. They've been doing this for 4 months now. It is still new and we're assessing it now.

Parent: Someone at the school said they were collaborative problem solving there.

Ruth: They told the staff to build the program. The teacher may be using what he used at the other setting.

Parent: It is surprising to hear that they are using a different program than the CACEL program.

Ruth: Maybe there wasn't a program at the beginning when they were starting.

Parent: I thought of specific families that are refugee families that are here. Do you have experts that deal with PTSD and helping kids who have witnessed war?

Ruth: We help them get what they need. Their needs are extensive and there are many agencies that are available to them. Parents have access to these agencies.

Laurie: Some of those families are the most complicated situations we face because there are so many issues. There are many experts involved.

Back to the budget:

Laurie: Main threads are: We used circuit breaker funds to pay for programs that are in place now. Because we had solid savings and we are seeing tuitions coming down because more kids are staying in the district.

Parent: When kids stay does that money go directly to Special Education?

Laurie: it is not a one to one cost. The tuition costs offset the budget, now we're able to pay salaries.

Parent: There is more money for inclusion if we don't send kids out of district?

Ruth: It is all about kids. The cost savings comes from the bringing kids back in. We're building more programs as we bring kids back into the district.

Parent: Reconfiguration of district question...

Laurie: There is a reconfiguration of 6th in Peabody. And 7th at Sanborn. It has helped a lot with transition and effectiveness. We trained kids in 6th grade and allowed for a softer landing at Peabody. They withheld laptops for a month and taught them executive function. They are delivering services in workshops. There are huge benefits because there is consistency. It is one half year in, but the outcome is more effective. The elementary school staff is going over to visit the new set up so they know what to describe to the kids.

Laurie: Building principals at elementary schools got help with assistant principals. They wore too many hats and covered Special Ed activities as well. Everything was getting compromised a bit. We had specialists at each school. ELA & Reading, Math & Technology specialists at each

school. Each principal considered whether they could combine. Assistant principals are now doing more shared responsibilities. Special Education has benefited greatly. Ruth has become a big part of each team. It is cost-neutral, but has a great value. Now each principal has a colleague to help. The evaluation system allowed for this change.

Laurie: Concord budget: We're just under 100K short of the finance committee's guideline. The benefit of building the budget the way we do, is that we can ask for what we need.

Parent: How much of the budget is teacher salary?

Laurie: 85% of the budget, it is lower at the high school because of OPEB. Everyone has done a zero-based budget it once, so it runs more smoothly now.

Ruth: It is smoother. Everyone wants to cushion it, but we just say, "what do you need?" And then we build in a contingency.

Parent: Sometimes it is hard to know what students need when they are still developing.

Laurie: Circuit breakers help with the larger unknown costs or unpredictability. We can build time into a process if a child needs out of district placement, and try our programs before placing them out. That gives us more time to bring in the money.

6. CMS New Building Update

- Dr. Laurie Hunter, Superintendent
- Ms. Ruth Grube, Director of Student Services

CMS New Building Update by Dr. Laurie Hunter:

We have an educational expert, an architect working on the committee

We have 2 sets of architects and educational architects to work with: Ewing Cole out of NY.

We've collected many hopes and dreams for the school. We've heard requests for universal design and environments that are friendly to all kids. Color even has an impact. Physical accessibility. We want all kids to feel like it is their school.

I have absolute confidence in them. We spent 2 full days at the school getting feedback from teachers and sharing ideas. I was talking with Dawn G. as co-chair, she is an expert, who is on the access board. She is representing people with disabilities.

Laurie showed an example of Dawn G's work. It is way beyond ADA. This is part of the core of the construction. It is baked in.

Looking at the Schematic Site Plan in Easton.

Parent: I appreciate your hard work. This is my first exposure to this. I'm concerned about the environment being exposed to wireless networks.

Laurie: There hasn't been a decision made about this yet. We need to study the research. It will be a discussion for the building committee.

Looking at the universal design principles:

Simple and intuitive: I met with a group of precocious students- they wanted brail on all rooms. CCHS is still difficult to navigate.

The options start to come to life with these examples.

Parent: I'm confident in professionals. Let's keep asking questions. We need to stay involved.

Parent: Children will have an option to stand up while working?

Laurie: Yes. The middle school will have flexibility in the furniture. Some standing, some sitting desks.

Parent: We're helping every student, not just students with IEPs.

Laurie: There is a bicycle desk. It is a stationary bike. The students pedal along. There are many options for all people, so kids with special needs don't stand out.

Parent: What are de-escalation places?

Laurie: a chill space. This is a place meant for quiet, with lower lights.

Ruth: It won't be seen as "that room."

Laurie: In terms of process: the design committee and design sub-committee will discuss where on the site it will sit. There is a recommendation from the building committee for when the vote should happen to the select board, in September. Then, we'll start to figure out the square footage and how many rooms. We'll identify what spaces we need and how big they will be.

Parent: What do you envision for the next forum?

Laurie: Sit placement. Need for visuals. We will continue to build the feedback process. This is Feb. 27th at 7 p.m. at the Peabody Forum.

Parent: An educator will stay with the project all the way through?

Laurie: The strength of the design & educational team we have is building the vision. We have a few years to build the vision among the staff. The firm we didn't hire would have been part of that planning. Now, the staff gets to be part of that process.

Visitor from the community: Stuart B Weeks: Part of the Center of American Studies.

We talk about how parents and kids are being hijacked by devices. If you all were being targeted by a sniper for weeks on end, how would you feel? For years, everyone smoked. All of a sudden warning labels appeared. IT companies are targeting our children. If this makes sense, our children sense that they are being targeted in an unconscious way. They are being targeted spiritually, physically and emotionally. If this touches a cord, I'd love to hear your thoughts. stuartbweeks@gmail.com I'll be bringing this book to the school committee. "A Philosophy for the People: Don't Become the Tool of Your Tools: We the People Common Sense Sketches."

7. Board Members to reflect on intentions for next school year

Current Board Members

Carol is ending her 3rd year at the end of June.

Membership/Outreach chair-

Joann Jensen- will end her term at the end of the school year.

Fatima will like to stay on as liaison

Tali will end her term with events in the summer

8. Other business (time dependent)

Events: Tali & Andrea

Susan Brennan, Speech pathologist, ASD NEST project in NY, Strength-based approach.

The classroom is built around 4 kids with high cognitive functioning. The rest of the kids in the class are neurotypicals and the class is designed around the kids with ASD. The presentation will be on April 2nd 7-8:30 in Concord. Susan Brennan developed a social intervention system. Autistic adults helped design the program. Tali spoke to Ruth about this inclusion model. This is the best model we've seen for working with kids on the spectrum. This is a general ed classroom. ASD NEST through NYU. Using a child's strengths to help their social development.

9. Close Meeting at 8:53 p.m.

Attendees:

Sarah Nichol

Sahina Brito

Tali Ditman

Andrea Smith

Buzz Congram

Joanne Jensen

Ruth Grube

Dr. Laurie Hunter

Others, unnamed here