

NORTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Norton, Massachusetts

NORTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE
BUDGET WORKSHOP
MINUTES OF MEETING

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NORTON TOWN CLERK
2024 MAR -1 AM 9:15

Date of School Committee Budget Workshop Meeting: Tuesday, February 6, 2024

Location: Norton Middle School Library

Call to Order: Chairperson Cohen called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance

Chairperson Cohen announced that the meeting was being recorded by Norton Media and Norton Public Schools and asked if anyone was recording to let the Committee know.

Present: Chairperson Mrs. Sheri Cohen, Vice Chairperson Mr. Deniz Savas, Mr. Nick Schleicher, Mrs. Justine Callanan, and Mr. Dan Sheedy ***Also present:*** Superintendent of Schools Dr. Jennifer O'Neill, School Business Administrator Mrs. Kristine Hadfield, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning Dr. Brian Ackerman, Director of Pupil Personnel Mr. Vincent Cerce, Coordinator of Special Education Ms. Cassandra Russo, Director of Facilities, Mr. Wade Lizotte, and Director of Instructional Technology Mrs. Karen Winsper.

Discussion on Proposed FY2025 School Department Budget:

The Committee and participants were provided with Community Budget Survey results as well as the updated Draft Proposed Budget Book pages. Dr. O'Neill began by reviewing the survey results. The ten-question anonymous survey was shared with families and staff and remained open for respondents for over two weeks. Additionally, the link was shared with the Finance Committee and Select Board for their membership and to be further shared as possible. In total, 412 responses were recorded.

Dr. O'Neill reviewed the first questions which identified the roles and relationships of the participants as they pertained to the District. She then reviewed the question which asked participants to assign importance ranking for ten different priorities. The results were broken down to identify that class size and educator compensation and retention were ranked as most important by participants. The results identified the total number of top three rankings by category and also broke that down to show number 1, 2, and 3 rankings by category. Additionally, the total top three ranking numbers were split by demographic to show the ranking by staff versus families. The Committee reviewed the additional comments provided regarding the category rankings. It was confirmed for the Committee that all comments were published, unedited, with the exception of removing anything that might be personally identifying. The Committee also asked for clarification on class sizes and guidelines and as to whether World Language is a graduation requirement.

Dr. O'Neill then presented the survey results pertaining to familiarity and involvement with the budget process. Participants were asked to define their level of familiarity with the process and whether they receive enough information to make informed decisions each year. Participants

categorized their involvement in the budget process and were given the opportunity to leave additional feedback on the process which was again shared in full.

The final survey results were discussed regarding Town Meeting attendance and how the District can help to increase awareness and participation. The Committee considered several options including recorded information and childcare at meetings. The survey data regarding topics respondents were most interested in learning about will be further broken down to understand whether specific topics were more of interest to one demographic or another.

Mrs. Hadfield reviewed the updated portions of the Draft Proposed Budget Book pages. She highlighted the page containing other revenue sources and revolving funds. These sources represent the most utilized funds to help offset the budget. The projected FY25 budget offsets were provided along with the FTE expected to be paid from each account. Similar information was provided for grant funds and other revenue sources as well as School Choice funds.

The Committee engaged in a discussion regarding regulations surrounding the use of School Choice funds as well as the rate of spending both reserved funds and anticipated revenue. Mrs. Hadfield has created budget lines for School Choice that mirror the lines in the regular budget to be able to accurately track where the funds are being spent.

Dr. O'Neill reviewed the enrollment data. Historical data includes School Choice students, and those numbers are included when advancing students in the enrollment projections. Projections for incoming students do not include School Choice.

Additional School Choice data was presented with enrollment by year and special education data. The Committee discussed the placement process for incoming School Choice elementary students. They engaged in an extended discussion regarding special education costs and the reimbursement rate for services for School Choice students as well as the process for accepting and approving applications. Further information regarding the reimbursement rate will be provided to the Committee.

Dr. O'Neill reviewed the implications of balancing the budget to a 5%, 4%, or 3% increase. A 5% increase will result in a \$2,431,666 deficit from level services. Potential cuts are:

- Decrease Instructional \$99,165
- Eliminate \$80,000 of Instructional Software
- Reallocate \$30,000 of salaries to Cafeteria Revolving
- Move \$300,000 of salaries to School Choice
- Reduce by 20-23 staff FTE
- Review of programming at all levels, class sizes, restructuring of departments to avoid student impact as much as possible.

With a 4% increase, the above cuts would take place along with reducing an additional 6 staff FTE to offset a \$2.7 million deficit. A 3% increase would result in additional staff cuts. Discussion ensued regarding the identification of potential staff positions to be reduced and how that process takes place.

The Committee discussed historical staffing changes including staff positions which were originally grant funded and were then absorbed into the budget. In addition to some of the added

positions in the past few years such as interventionists, specialists, dean of students, there have also been cuts to classroom teachers, special subject teachers, support staff. Mr. Vincent Hayward, NMS Principal, outlined positions that have been lost over the past several years and how cuts impact scheduling at the middle school level. The Committee discussed trends in the District with staffing levels, budgeting, and student achievement.

The Committee considered various scenarios to balance the budget while reducing cuts to staffing such as fee increases, eliminating non-mandated transportation, and using additional reserved School Choice funds to cover salaries. The discussion transitioned to athletics and the benefits of the programs, as well as other extracurriculars, to participating students and the school community. Mr. Aaron Sumner, Athletic Director, was present at the meeting and helped clarify questions regarding fees and rental costs.

A conversation followed regarding state and federal mandates and the ramifications of not providing those services, including loss of funding, impact on staff licensure, accreditation, and outside control of the district. The Committee reiterated that difficult decisions would have to be made and emphasized the need to consider priorities. The funding formula for vocational and agricultural schools as well as charter schools was addressed.

In responding to a question regarding the feasibility of closing a school, Dr. O'Neill stated that the District will provide a special education update will recaps on programs and services. The district alignment study will look at enrollment and building capacity. The use and lack of availability of open classroom space was discussed as well as the space that is currently leased to outside programs. The Committee acknowledged that even if space allowed, closing a building would be unlikely to result in significant savings as those students still need to be educated and services would largely just shift to other buildings to meet increased demand in those schools.

The next steps were discussed. The School Department will provide the Committee with a more defined list of specific programs and positions that would be impacted by budget cuts for the February 29th meeting. Based on the information shared during the joint meeting with the Finance Committee and Select Board even a 5% increase seems unlikely, so potential cuts will be presented in priority order to allow the Committee to see the impacts of cuts to obtain a balanced budget at 3%, 4%, and 5% and ultimately allow a decision to be made regarding the finalized recommended budget that will be presented to the Town.

The Committee thanked the staff in attendance.

Other Business:

None presented.

Adjourn:

MOTION: by Mr. Savas to adjourn the School Committee meeting

SECOND: by Mr. Nicholas Schleicher

VOTE: 5 - 0 Motion Carries

The meeting adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

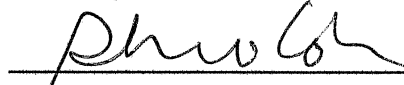
Next School Committee Meeting Date:

- Thursday, February 8, 2024, at 6:00 p.m., in the NMS Library

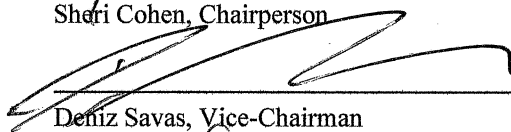
Documents and Other Exhibits Used at Meeting:

- FY25 Community Budget Survey
- FY25 Proposed Budget Book Draft Pages

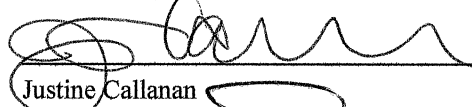
Respectfully Submitted,
Jennifer O'Neill, Ed.D.
Secretary Pro Tem



Shari Cohen, Chairperson



Deniz Savas, Vice-Chairman



Justine Callanan



Nick Schleicher



Dan Sheedy

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