

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

106 Hancock Road

Peterborough, New Hampshire

CONTOOCCOOK VALLEY SCHOOL BOARD

School Board Meeting

Friday, March 19, 2021

6:00 p.m.

Physical Location: None

Virtual Location:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81412188945?pwd=d0FwZm1BVnRtV2pYMmhIMGtTV1dpUT09>

Meeting ID: 814 1218 8945

Passcode: 8Xj3pa

Phone: +1 646 558 8656

Webinar ID: 814 1218 8945

Passcode: 576263

Minutes

BOARD

Rich Cahoon, Keira Christian,
Richard Dunning, Alan Edelkind,
Jim Fredrickson, Katherine Heck,
Janine Lesser, Kevin Pobst,
Robert Short, Jr., Liz Swan,
Tim Theberge, Dr. Stephen Ullman,
Jerry Wilson

ADMINISTRATION

Dr. Kimberly Saunders, Supt.
Dr. Ann Forrest, Asst. Supt.
Lori Schmidt, B.A.
Cari Christian-Coates, Student Serv.
Carrie James, H.R.
Tim Grossi, Facilities
Kat Foecking, GBS
Tim Conway, SMS
Amy Janoch, HES
Anne O'Bryant, SMS
Nicole Pease, DCS
Larry Pimental, PES

1. Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance

Tim Theberge called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

2. Right to Know for Public Meeting Emergency Declaration

Tim Theberge read the "Right to Know for Public Meeting Emergency Declaration".

3. Public Comment

Tim Theberge opened the first period of public comment. He said that the board encourages the public to attend meetings. Each speaker is allowed two minutes to speak. Tim shared the rules for public speaking, which included the expectation of people being respectful. The School Board will not permit harassing speeches and will be considered out of order and will be terminated to speak further.

Dr. Klonel, family physician in the district, expressed concerns about the K-8 Remote Plan from the medical side. Looking into the fall, more and more will be immunized and will not cover everyone. She said that she would like to see more about need and demand for remote school before full funding a remote school.

4. 2021-2022 Budget Discussion

Statement on Recount

Tim Theberge thanked all of the volunteers who gave their time to come out and count the ballots. The School Board did not request the recount. The recount was properly requested by registered voters of the District. The School Board served as the Board of Recount, as required by statute. Board Members were not involved in recounting the ballots.

The recount was a hand count. There were no counting machines used.

The sealed boxes of ballots from the towns were opened in plain view of all in attendance and were counted by the volunteers from the towns.

Every ballot was projected onto a screen which allowed members of the public to view the ballots and object or contest a ballot.

At the end of the recount, there were zero contested ballots.

Sense of the Board - Greenfield - Sharon

Tim Theberge said that the district relies on the towns to conduct the elections. The result showed that in most towns, the original counts were 100% accurate – including towns that utilized machines and hand counting. However, the recount showed significant differences in both Sharon and Greenfield. He asked if the results should be further discussed with the respective Town Clerks.

Katherine Heck said that it would be a good idea to ensure that everyone is on the same page and following protocols. She said that she knows that Greenfield is taking this to heart and is discussing changes moving forward.

Stephen Ullman said that human error is always present when large quantities are being counted.

Jim Fredrickson said that he will talk to the Sharon Town Moderator and make recommendations for changes moving forward.

Rich Cahoon said that the question asked was a sense of the Board if the District Clerk should talk to the Moderators in the towns.

TimTheberge confirmed that he suggested a clerk to clerk discussion.

Janine Lesser asked what that conversation would be about.

Tim Theberge said that it would be a conversation about what they think happened and potential changes moving forward.

Dick Dunning moved to have the School District Clerk speak to Greenfield and Sharon Selectmen to discuss what would be helpful.

Stephen Ullman second.

Robert Short said that it is making sure that all of the towns check their procedures in an open conversation that all of the towns are following procedures.

Janine Lesser preferred that the conversation take place with all nine district clerks.

Dick Dunning modified motion that the conversations take place with all of the towns.

Stephen Ullman modified his second.

Kevin Pobst asked why the District Clerk would have the conversation rather than the Moderator. The Moderator is in charge of what the clerk does.

Dick Dunning further modified his motion that the Moderator speak with the Selectmen in each of the towns.

Stephen Ullman second the amended motion.

Unanimous on a roll call vote.

Statement on Budget

The passing of the budget is the narrowest margin in ConVal history which compels the Board to discuss the budget. Tim said that he knows this because he has now read nearly every annual report from 1968 to 2000. The 2021-2022 budget has been available for public review and discussion since December 5. The K-8 remote school was included in that budget. The budget was discussed at multiple school board meetings, multiple Budget and Property Committee meetings, and the deliberative session. The public is able to attend all of those meetings and are encouraged to participate in the Board meetings and deliberative session. Any suggestion that the Board attempted to slip this through or be anything other than fully transparent is fundamentally incorrect.

Dick Dunning said that it would be his recommendation to look at the remote funding and put it aside and use that funding for other purposes the upcoming school year.

Alan Edelkind thanked the moderator, administration, and staff for conducting a well-organized recount in such a short time. The recount did establish that the recount resulted in .1 of 1%. It does say that a lot of voters voted one way or another. Voters are becoming more engaged. Most of the dissatisfaction is with the remote school. There is dissatisfaction with the budget increase. We need to show that we are listening. How do we accomplish this? We have established cuts if we were in default mode. They would have no effect on students.

Alan Edelkind moved to have the School Board suspend from all of the identified Tier 0 and 1 above the yellow row which identified items that could be deleted to achieve the default budget.

Tim Theberge said that he does not feel that is in order because the voters approved the budget. Dr. Kimberly Saunders said that the school board can make transfers in the budget any time as they see fit. Kimberly said that Alan's recommendation does not need to be done all at once or now. A larger conversation in the public might take place before each are cut. The list is not public because it has staff listed.

Rich Cahoon said that we already voted on the Tier 0 adjustments. Regardless of the recount, we already voted to make those. It might be appropriate to reconsider and/or discuss.

The vote to reduce Tier 0 would not lower the budget, they just would not be spent.

Jim Fredrickson said that the vote the other night was based on the thought that we had a default budget.

Rich Cahoon motioned to reconsider the cut

Dick Dunning second to reconsider the vote on Tier 0.

It would bring all of that back to be looked at in detail.

Katherine Heck said that the budget passed but we have a clear message from voters that they cannot bear the burden of the cost or were not in favor of remote school. She said that compromise should be considered in the spirit of consideration. She spoke about a future bond vote.

Katherine Heck further said that she cannot vote in favor of a remote school. We will be taxed on the full amount voted. We could use financial tools to lower spending. She said that she would like to see \$780K removed and talk about ways to commit those dollars back to the voters.

Stephen Ullman said that we really don't know for sure why the outcome was what it was. There is evidence that some opposed the K-8 Remote School, but we don't know for sure. Dr. Ullman asked if we were to restore the cuts made in Tier 0 and Tier 1 above the yellow line, could that money be redirected at lost learning.

The motion to reconsider would put all of it back and the board could reconsider.

Keira Christian said that the voters in Bennington are very clear that K-8 Remote is not a good use of budgetary funds. We should revisit and reallocate those funds for loss learning.

Jim Fredrickson said from a process point of view, the board should put it all back on the table and set aside health insurance money.

Jim Fredrickson put Tier 0 and 1 back on the table.

Rich Cahoon said that his motion accomplished just that.

A vote in the affirmative would put it all back in.

Opposed: Kevin Pobst, Alan Edelkind, Keira Christian, Robert Short, Jr., Jerry Wilson.

Motion carried putting everything back in place.

Jim Fredrickson moved to reconsider K-8 Remote School and look at alternatives, a survey, and research. Not a removal but a revisit.

Stephen Ullman second.

Dick Dunning said that he is not comfortable with the motion. We are either in or out. If we want to help students with loss of learning he would be okay.

Katherine Heck agreed with Dick Dunning and said she could not support that motion. She hears that the size of the budget was viewed as too high and highly problematic. Federal dollars are coming to assist with loss learning. With that, we will probably be in good shape to address loss learning.

Liz Swan agreed about looking into loss learning. We will need to come up with solutions for that in the future. Some who voted for the budget do value the remote education. There are some individuals that need clarity despite that this information is available to them. She sees people who value education and remote learning as a value for the future in a pandemic.

Stephen Ullman said that this proposal was carefully researched by administration. He defended how solidly administration researched this.

Kevin Pobst was impressed with the presentation that was made for the alternative if K-8 was not in the budget. They have elementary figured out. High school is figured out. The middle school is what has to be changed. There would be personnel needed. He would like to talk about that as an alternative.

Jim Fredrickson said that he is uncomfortable saying that we won't spend anything on remote learning of the \$780K.

Robert Short said that the \$780K was to set up a whole separate school. If remote learning is needed and required then we would have to improve upon it. There are unknowns and there is sticker shock. He appreciates the thought that went into it.

Jerry Wilson said that the circumstances at the time that this was developed are different than the present circumstances.

Dr. Kimberly Saunders said that there are 245 K-8 students who are remote.

Jerry Wilson asked what guarantees that the same number would avail themselves. Kimberly said none.

Jerry Wilson asked if there is a minimum number of students we would arrive at to make it viable. We want to avoid setting up another small school.

Dr. Saunders reminded that some of the ESSER dollars could be used for remote education. We talked about that before deliberative session. There are options for using grant funds for remote learning.

Rich Cahoon said that he will vote to remove K-8 remote from the budget. This was carefully designed and a lot of work went into it. It is remarkable that this district who went to such great lengths to get kids back in school would be rushing to get them into remote. It has been lost in recent debate.

Kevin Pobst said that he would vote to remove K-8 but does not feel that we have to eliminate some level of remote for those in need of it. He is intrigued at using grant funding for that purpose. He is not in favor generally of using grant funding for personnel, but in this case it does make sense.

Jim Fredrickson said that if we decide not to do K-8 Remote there is \$780K that we cannot return until the next school year. That money would sit somewhere unused unless we decide to do something with it. It is a separate vote, separate discussion.

Kimberly Saunders said that she does not know of a school district giving funds back during the school year. She is not sure if it is possible.

Lori Schmidt said that she has not heard of that happening and she would need to do some research on the matter.

Dick Dunning said that we are not saying remote cannot take place; we are saying that we are not using these funds for remote learning. When this plan was brought to us the circumstances were different. We have heard that voters are for and against a remote school. The board can determine the practical use for these monies or return them at the end of the year.

Katherine Heck agreed. It is her vote not to have a separate remote school. There is no way to reduce the appropriation legally. The only way to show any sort of ease is to have a fund balance at the end of this year to lower the tax rate. If it is possible, she would like to talk about this.

Jim Fredrickson said that the motion is to remove K-8 Remote School from the budget.

Stephen Ullman confirmed he would amend his second.

Rich Cahoon said that the way to impact the tax rate is to come up with an unexpended fund balance that is in excess of funding the trust funds to impact the rate.

Kevin Pobst asked if the \$780K would be used to replenish trust funds in June 2022 if other funds are not available to replenish the funds.

Jim Fredrickson said that at the end of this school year, if funds remain, they will fund trust funds voted previously. The same would occur the next fiscal year.

Jim Fredrickson said that if we don't spend the \$780 it would be available to fund trusts.

Kevin Pobst asked if we could phrase it so it did not in the next vote. Jim said the board is getting ahead of ourselves.

Kimberly Saunders said that the way that it was voted was that the money could not be touched until 2023.

Kevin Pobst said that he would like to see the 780K to go back to the voters.

Jim Fredrickson said that the motion on table is not to spend \$780K on the proposed Remote K-8 school.

Dick Dunning said that it is important to say that we will not use these funds for remote learning. We are anticipating federal support but that does not mean that we will get it. If we are short changed, we would have resources to fall back on.

Janine Lesser clarified for those listening that the \$780K was for a K-8 Competency Based Remote School. It is clear that people don't know enough about it. She will vote to take it out.

She is worried that we will still need a remote option to offer to students. We had a proposal on the table to regain loss learning at \$1.2M and it was not favored. It is expensive.

Stephen Ullman said that the \$780K was an innovative program with competency based and was progressive. This was not willy nilly.

Jim Fredrickson moved to remove the \$780,000 included in the approved 2021-22 Budget for the K-8 Multi-Age Competency Based Remote School.

Dick Dunning said that if we vote in the affirmative does it mean that \$780K cannot be used and must be returned.

Tim Theberge agreed with concern of the words "remove the \$780K from the budget".

Kimberly Saunders said that it sounds like what is being attempted is that \$780K will not be spent on a K-8 Competency Based Remote School. Those dollars would not be spent on a remote school or remote program.

Jim Fredrickson confirmed his intent with his motion is not to implement the proposed K-8 Multi-Age Competency Based Remote School program.

Rich Cahoon said that we had a proposal to do something. It is simple, we are not going to do it.

Stephen Ullman agreed and called the question.

In favor: Rich Cahoon, Katherine, Liz Swan, Stephen Ullman, Kevin Pobst, Janine Lesser, Dick Dunning, Alan Edelkind, Jim Fredrickson, Keira Christian, Robert Short, Jr., Jerry Wilson.

Rich Cahoon said that Kevin Pobst has spoken about concerns with funding positions with grants rather than the operational budget. Tier 0 was moving from operational budget into IDEA Grant. Rich agreed with Kevin's position and agreed to fund with the operational budget now that it has passed; total of \$117K.

Rich Cahoon moved to move two positions from IDEA to the operating budget.

Dick Dunning second.

The two positions were an ESP Case Manager and COTA.

Katherine Heck agreed with Rich and Kevin. She said that she understands taking it out of grants and keep in the budget however, she is in support of Tier 0 cuts proposed.

Kimberly Saunders said that she would like opportunity to talk to these individuals.

Jim Fredrickson said that \$1.4M is back in from Tier 0. He asked what is being voted.

Rich Cahoon said that he does not want to see them moved to the grant.

Kevin Pobst said that if positions are to be filled they would be filled from the budget and not from grants. They don't have to be filled but if they are they would be funded from the budget.

Kevin Pobst said that none of the positions under Tier 0 will be funded through grants.

Jim Fredrickson said that we don't need a motion, they are in the budget.

Rich Cahoon and Dick Dunning withdrew their motion and second.

Stephen Ullman withdrew his withdrawal of comments. He said that it appears that we may not need someone in the new position of elementary school counselor. That position should be withdrawn.

Stephen Ullman moved that we not spend \$85K on a new elementary school counselor because we have a healthy ratio.

Kevin Pobst second.

Janine Lesser had questions about ratio and asked the impact on mental health services.

Kimberly Saunders said that if we feel like we need to have this, we know kids are coming back with significant mental health needs. She does have a concern about their needs. We have seen increasing mental health needs K-12. We can use ESSER if we think that this is a temporary situation and use grant funds for a year. She believes we have more mental health needs than in prior years. If we do not help a child in crisis we cannot teach.

Rich Cahoon said that he did not research anything but rather questioned the ratio of student to counselor. He said that he does not want to get out of his lane.

Tim Theberge reported that he has heard in favor of the number we are adding for counselor positions for the record.

Kimberly Saunders said that this was not just a crisis for many of our families, it was catastrophic. This is an important position likely for two to three years.

Keira Christian cautioned the Board that State recommended numbers don't reflect life in a pandemic.

Robert Short said that this is not only for the students, it is to reduce travel time for staff between schools. If we are seeing crisis work, why not add counselors to the larger schools?

Kimberly said that we added two student supports at the middle schools; one each. We are adding positions. PES was not part of the conversation.

Stephen Ullman withdrew his motion.

He said that he thought that there was nationally recommended student: counselor ratios. He withdrew his intent to withdraw his motion and said he would simply vote against.

Dick Dunning asked Dr. Saunders to look at needs and bring recommendation forward. He would like to look at additional resources.

Call the question: Vote would remove position from budget if in the affirmative.

In favor: Kevin Pobst

Opposed: Rich Cahoon, Katherine Heck, Liz Swan, Stephen Ullman, Janine Lesser, Dick Dunning with a serious look at PES, Alan Edelkind, Jim Fredrickson, Keira Christian, Robert Short, Jr., Jerry Wilson

The result of the vote is that the position stays in.

Kevin Pobst moved that four positions under Tier 0 that were not going to be replaced due to attrition not be filled for the coming year.

Robert Short, Jr. second.

Dick Dunning said that his understanding was that those funds would be removed to fund other positions in the district. The funds for those positions were going to be reallocated in the district.

Dr. Kimberly Saunders confirmed. When we made cuts for a default, we looked at attrition first. These were positions that were felt not needed to be refilled based on enrollment. Regardless of how the board votes, there is a slim chance they would be filled.

Jim Fredrickson said that total would be \$256K. Is there a way to put these funds in a separate line and isolate them? Katherine Heck said that could not be done.

Kimberly Saunders asked the board to consider those in attendance at tonight's meeting.

Dick Dunning suggested the discussion stop and go to public comment and then closure.

5. Public Comment

Bob Edwards commented on Katherine Heck's comment on moving \$780K out of the budget and put aside and discuss the purpose that it might go to in the future. He offered caution that if the public voted on this amount of money for a specific purpose, it should be very transparent. Hopefully it will go back to the taxpayer. It appears a bait and switch. If it will be spent on a different program, he suggested a public meeting.

Rob Christian expressed appreciation to the board and all that spoke. He said that the towns do support education and funding it. They are opposed to the \$780K for remote school. We have found ourselves in a situation to have a good upcoming year. He asked the board to please use the money judiciously; give back what you can but don't be afraid to spend some of it.

Bill Taylor said that Katherine Heck's position on the \$780K is the way to go. This is the first ConVal Budget he voted against. He spoke about the difficulty for the students of the Class of 2021.

Brendan Bohl said that more transparency about what is going on is needed. It is difficult to find information. The Facebook page is not used for promoting the budget. We are more worried about losing students than improving our school. He favored competency-based education. He said that he likes the schools.

Crista Salamy thanked everyone from the School Board, SAU, Administration, Teachers, and staff working hard. She voted for the budget and said that the board will hear from people in dispute. There are 50% in favor of the budget. It is important to remember that we are in the job of educating children in the least restrictive environment. She knows that we were losing \$400K from State Aid and Retirement needed to be funded. Positions were not being eliminated from cutting staff other than attrition. Staff are not being added.

Mackenzie Nichols thanked the board but thanked Katherine Heck for her extra level of care for the taxpayers. There are a lot of people who struggle with taxes. She sees it in her work. She said that she hopes that the entire board looks at how we serve our children and not just the enrollment numbers dropping.

Kurtis Grasset asked about Article 12 passing.

Kimberly Saunders Mr. Grasset to send the question to her and she would respond.

5% is permissible based on the warrant. Policy Committee is putting together a policy limiting it to 2.5% at any time during the year. What was passed was 5% but Policy will limit it to 2.5% of net assessment.

Abbe Hamilton asked when ConVal tends to implement the new social guidelines from 6 feet to 3 feet. Tim said that when the district makes that decision, the information will be sent to families and communities.

Kimberly Saunders said that she would tell parents to look for something early next week.

6. Non-Public Session: RSA 91-A:3,II

None.

Jerry Wilson moved to adjourn at 7:52 p.m. Robert Short, Jr. second. Unanimous on a roll call vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Brenda Marschok