

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS
106 Hancock Road
Peterborough, New Hampshire

CONTOOCOOK VALLEY SCHOOL BOARD

Selectmen's Advisory Committee

Thursday, November 18, 2021
SMS Library
7:00 p.m.

Minutes

Present: John Robertson (Chair - Antrim), Bill Kennedy (Peterborough), George Willard (Temple), Carole Monroe (Dublin), Diane Callahan (Sharon), Stephen Ullman (Board Member), Tim Theberge (Board Chair), Kimberly Rizzo Saunders (Superintendent), Lori Schmidt (Business Administrator), Katherine Heck (Board Member)

1. Call to Order

John Robertson called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

2. Approve Minutes of October 28, 2021

Bill Kennedy moved to accept the minutes of October 28, 2021. Diane Callahan second. Minutes were unanimously accepted.

3. Report on Budget Work Session

Stephen Ullman Reported:

A five-hour session was held on Saturday, November 6, 2021. There's been a little bit of faculty movement. Truly, too early to say. I cannot give you any information about tax rates. Suffice it to say, that over the five and a half hours, we looked at a whole lot of aspects of a plan. Jim Frederickson - a very, very bright guy - he keeps our statistics on his computer. I don't have much specific to say. Do you want me to say anything about the Education Committee?

Committee Chair: Any committee that you would like to report on.

The only one I can tell you about... I'm chairing the Education Committee. At every meeting we are looking at learning recovery. We're told not to say "learning loss" because that's a downer. We've had presentations by Amy Janoch who started some small-scale learning recovery programs last year at all three levels, elementary, middle and high school. Clearly, we need to expand the number of students involved in these programs. We're trying to do acceleration of learning and a variety of other techniques. We hear from Amy Janoch at each meeting. More seriously, we got the fall results from New Hampshire SAS (for younger children) and we got the NWEA results (third through tenth). To generalize, horrendously but accurately, our math scores are lower than our reading scores. We look at the percentage of students who fall above the 50th percentile. With the younger kids, that's within the State of New Hampshire, with the older kids it's national. There's quite a difference of marked proficiency at almost all of the grades. There also, and this is my hobby horse, seems to be a bit of a slump in learning, at least as reflected in these tests, in the fifth grade. Young people come over from the fourth grade to the fifth grade; we test them at the beginning of the sixth grade. Now

they do tend to make a recovery by the eighth grade. Five years ago, the District adopted what's called OGAP - math assessment techniques - not supposed to say it's a curriculum. For five years, we've been using these materials and for five years, there's really not been a tremendous improvement in math scores. So, we've asked Dr. Forrest to take a good hard look at the math curriculum. The Committee is also looking at advanced learning credit from other sources or policies. Let me finish by saying in these standardized tests, socioeconomic differences are undeniable. That is, young people on free and reduced lunch were significantly worse, significantly worse in terms of both reading and math proficiency than the contingent of all of the students. That's a problem. If we are going to be a channel for upward mobility for kids from modest backgrounds mastering their subjects, we are not doing something right. I don't know if other districts are doing something right, but we're not succeeding with kids from modest means. That's my report.

Committee Member: When you say there's a marked difference in the most recent test scores compared to other previous ones, is that true across the country?

Stephen Ullman: There's not a huge difference from how fifth graders did in 2017 as opposed to how fifth graders did in 2021.

Committee Member: I was thinking not just fifth graders, but...

Stephen Ullman: We're assuming damage, and this is nationwide, due to COVID.

Committee Member: When they look at the test scores are they comparing them to New Hampshire test scores?

Stephen Ullman: Yes.

Committee Member: Are the overall test scores lower than they were - meaning that there has been a proficiency loss for everyone, but we're even lower?

Stephen Ullman: I wasn't prepared at all for giving a report - I'll take a look at that. What we are assuming - and this is a debatable assumption - is that all of the children in New Hampshire had to cope with COVID, so we are still concerned with how **our** children did as opposed to kids in Berlin, Manchester or Rye.

Committee Member: Has anyone seriously considered fifth graders going back to the elementary schools?

Stephen Ullman: We have one school who, from time-to-time, has fifth grade. I haven't heard any discussion of that.

Committee Member: In five years you might be able to show some indication...

Stephen Ullman: This is more suspicion than anything else. There are eight elementary schools. Some elementary schools, at least in the mind of the teachers, seem to be preparing students more effectively than others. I'm not going to get into the details. We have three elementary schools with enrollment under 50. You don't have a choice of teachers. You have situations where you have combined grades.

Committee Member: Do those schools do worse?

Stephen Ullman: I said suspicion. The data have not been disaggregated by elementary schools. What happens is that the teachers report that they can tell where the various students went to elementary school.

Committee Member: I'm curious to know - I'm from Dublin, and there's always a fight as to whether to keep a school in town/keep fifth grade in elementary. If we had some data that says these schools that have under 50 kids are doing better or doing worse or not any different than anybody else, I think that would be helpful to know.

Committee Chair: What you are curious to know, and we all should be curious to know, is if the students from FES are on par with AES or PES? It makes sense to track.

Stephen Ullman: I will ask Ann Forrest.

A discussion continued about trends and stereotypes and socioeconomic status with regard to data and closing schools.

4. Tax Rate

Committee Chair: Do you know anything about the tax rate?

Committee Member: It was done this week.

Committee Member: The tax rate has come down (at least in Dublin). Remember there was the \$750K that was passed, but never used? Did it show up in this tax rate?

Committee Member: No - it will be in the next one. The bill to the town from the District may be a little less each month.

Diane Callahan of Sharon arrived at 7:20 p.m.

Went back to Agenda Item 2: Approve the Minutes of October 28, 2021.

Steve Ullman left the meeting and went to the Strategic Plan Committee Meeting being held down the hall to see if anyone could join this meeting.

Stephen Ullman returned.

Tim Theberge joined us and gave the following report:

We are in full budget mode right now. Some decisions were made on Tuesday. We gave the Administration our target percentage. They came in under. They gave a prioritized list of items to add back in. We decided on most of those. The one remaining item is preschool - which option. This was supposed to be the final year for our push for preschool for all - big ticket item. Discussion about what the right number is for this year's budget - \$300K vs \$700K. There is some question about whether the approach that they are proposing - which is the same approach that has always been the approach - is the right way to go (full, truly-blended service delivery). The way preschool works in New Hampshire is about a 50/50 split between children that are on IEPs or need special services and their Non-IEP peers. IEP students enroll for free, and Non-IEP students pay on a sliding scale to enroll. The research suggests that the preschools who provide access to all of those services that would be available to children on an IEP as a standard suite of services, provides the best early investment for savings later on. We have the RAM study (focused on New Hampshire). Related to

that is: How many spots does that buy us? Are we willing to give a little on quality if that means I get another two classrooms worth of spots - we are told the demand is there for it in this area? Preschool for all in some form will happen. I think it's just a question of what version will happen.

Committee Member: To what degree do we pay for it?

Stephen Ullman: There are three price options for three levels of service we are considering.

Tim Theberge: That's the last planned big-ticket question. There will be a presentation on December 7, 2021. Many Board members were not here when we started down this process, so it's just a way to make sure everybody is on the same page.

At ~7:30 PM, Kimberly Saunders, Lori Schmidt and Katherine Heck joined the meeting.

Committee Member: The kindergarten class is quite large.

Kimberly Rizzo Saunders: Yes, we've had two years with historically large kindergarten class sizes.

Committee Member: Are we expecting a similar surge for preschool?

Kimberly Rizzo Saunders: I would need to check census numbers. They are consistent but not larger. It has leveled off and seems to be up from where it was five years ago. We won't see 3,000 children like we did in 2000 to 2005.

Committee Member: Are federal monies available for preschool?

Kimberly Rizzo Saunders: We are hoping - always - that there are federal dollars. With that said, how long it takes to trickle down is important. The other thing you need to know is that the DoE is not super friendly to public school right now. Federal funds flow through the State Educational Agency and they decide how the money will be dispersed. This has been problematic for New Hampshire over the last four years.

A discussion about the Amendment to Bill 225 took place. Highlights from that discussion:

- Has support to pass in the House. Reach out to your House members now.
- Stop it at the Senate.
- Reach out and explain the impact on your towns NOW. Make personal connections with your delegates.
- Kimberly Rizzo Saunders is attending a meeting tomorrow and will have more information.
- The EFA list contains students we have never seen nor have they registered as homeschool students.
- Towns may suddenly become responsible to pay for these students.
- In New Hampshire very rarely do they withdraw a benefit.
- Important to understand the issue.

Committee Member: I was looking at the budget and noticed funding for Medicaid dollars - \$170K one year and then \$63K the next. What is that and how does Medicaid funding work?

Kimberly Rizzo Saunders: The state passed a regulation that made it difficult - we had to hire a pediatrician to come in to provide doctor's orders in order for our students to access the services that we are legally obligated to provide. New Hampshire decided that in order to apply for reimbursement for services, we had to have doctor's orders for services we provide in school. These

are services directly related to them accessing their education, which is why they happen in the educational environment. The present Commissioner of Education said, when he was in the Legislature: "1. I want a voucher program in place and 2. I want to diminish public education." Some people thought it couldn't possibly happen. New Hampshire is one of the top five state education systems in the country and has been for approximately the past 75 years. I would prepare for that to change.

Committee Member: The other issue that we need to address is the Charter School that is coming to town.

Kimberly Rizzo Saunders: We can address that if you want, but I haven't had a chance to meet with them. I am not a die-hard... *we have to shut down the Charter Schools*. The competitive education marketplace doesn't bother me as long as the field is level. I need to speak to the people and find out what their philosophy is, what they're driving at, what their curriculum is going to be...? The issues around charter schools in New Hampshire aren't about the charter or the choice, usually it's about the local public school still being responsible for doing things like providing educational services for special education students. There is another local charter school that we are working with who does a lot of things outdoors, so I've got a speech pathologist spending 25 minutes trying to locate the child. A lot of it has to do with not the actual charter school, but the way the State says we have to provide services for them. I need some time to meet with them and find out what's going to happen. They are calling it a classical education. If that is the case, then they are probably not going to be looking for students that have a lot of high needs.

Committee Member: I did look them up in Florida. The parents were appalled when they found out what they didn't have to do that the public schools were required to do.

Kimberly Rizzo Saunders: I know the local educators that are involved. These are not people who are not educationally minded. I don't really want a charter school in my backyard, if I'm being completely honest, it makes my job harder. But I also want to make sure we separate all of the other bologna that's happening with the State from this opportunity that could bring some students into school who are being homeschooled right now, who are probably going to end up with us in high school anyway, so any kind of school setting would be good. I have to weigh that.

Committee Member: You had a budget meeting on Saturday. How did that go?

Kimberly Rizzo Saunders: It's still in the works. The guidance from the board was very clear. The budget cannot increase more than 2%. The initial budget doesn't include the new pieces that the Board is stapling with. We are looking at \$51,400,000, which represents just slightly below 2%. There are still some decisions that they need to make - preschool being the big one. I'm always willing to give a preschool presentation if you want. What we know about investing in high-quality preschool environments in integrated preschools is that every dollar you spend there it's estimated that you will save \$3 to \$6 in or around third or fourth grade. The reason for that is because most of the time if you have students who have OT/PT issues, for example, and they are in a high-quality preschool environment, those are recognized really quickly and at that age you can often resolve that issue before it starts interfering with their education. So, that's the long-term goal. They will need to make some decisions. We've slowly ramped up the preschool opportunities. This would be the third year. Originally the goal was if you live in the District, you can come to preschool. There needs to be a decision if we are really ready to pull that trigger or if we need one more step. A lot of that, obviously, is cost related.

Committee Member: I'm going to ask a question that is controversial. We have nine schools or nine towns. Sharon does not have a school. For all these other little towns that have elementary schools,

I know it is an emotional issue for those towns. I lived in Temple before I moved to Sharon, and I was very upset that my child could not stay in Temple. At that time, I thought it was the worst thing in the world. But they came to Peterborough and things opened up. More people to become friends with, more opportunity, more diversity. It really made a difference in their education, and I just think a lot of these tiny towns where there are so few kids, they just don't have the same kind of relationships and opportunities to meet people. It concerns me, and I don't know if it would save money.

Stephen Ullman: Kimberly, do you want to comment on how the Articles of Agreement pose rather large obstacles to consolidate.

Committee Member: Can I say one thing, please? In our conversation (you weren't here - we had a conversation about this) one of the questions we were asking was: Is there any evidence that the smaller schools do better, the same, or worse when they finally get to the middle school?

Kimberly Rizzo Saunders: Here's the issue research-wise. We do know that smaller class sizes help, but here's the clincher. None of those big class size studies even contemplated student class sizes under 12. Right now, we are running into an issue of spreading our resources so thin. We really need some math intervention. When I have one math interventionist for eight elementary schools, how do I make that work? I would never say there aren't pluses and minuses. Sometimes it depends on the child; sometimes it depends on the family. It is an emotional issue and that is part of the problem. You can't put together a logical argument about the size of schools when people are very attached to their small-town schools. A lot of people believe that there is a relationship between the worth of their home and whether or not there is a school in their town. There are all of those pieces as well. The Administration has - on multiple occasions - put forward presentations. Let's say we don't have all of the smaller schools, even if we didn't then take the \$3M, or however much savings would exist in the budget, but still spend those dollars. What would that mean? It might mean we could start World Languages in Kindergarten. It has to be part of the conversation. What do the taxpayers and the community members want from their school district? And, what can we do in our present structure and what can we do in a reconfigured structure?

Committee Member: The question we discussed earlier came up when we were talking about test scores. We know that we have the test scores for the schools individually as well as for the District. So, why is it we can't look at how the schools do, rather than as a whole, so that we know whether or not the students coming from a small school do better, the same, or worse when they get to the fifth or sixth grade? Statistically, not anecdotally.

Kimberly Rizzo Saunders: I cannot give you that information because the cohorts are so small that you would be able to identify students. Additionally, the cohorts are so small that sometimes one student makes that average go way up or way down. And finally, the third piece of that really is, in order to do that study, and we can do that if you want, we would have to control for demographics, control for socioeconomic status, etc., and that is a considerable effort.

Stephen Ullman: And statistically questionable. If you had a sample size of 10 fourth graders from Francestown and then you tried to impose socioeconomic controls on the sub-sample, no social scientist would suggest that you even try to do that.

Committee Member: Because the sample size isn't big enough?

Kimberly Rizzo Saunders: Exactly.

Committee Member: Unfortunately, the anecdotal information flies. You hear:

- sixth grade thinks that fifth or fourth graders coming from another school don't do well;
- When they get there, they can identify which school they are coming from;
- My child is in small classes so they must be doing better because they get personal attention.

We have no way of statistically looking at this, so I think that hurts whether we move forward with anything else.

Kimberly Rizzo Saunders: I agree with you and understand. My favorite anecdote is "my kid was doing fine when they were one of four fourth graders and now they are in fifth grade with 25 kids and they are not doing well." For the parent, it is about the class size. My question is: Is it because they got hand-held so much? I get it, but when you have sample sizes of three, four, five, six, there's not anything you can do that has any meaning, statistically.

Katherine Heck: Can I just add that this is a concern at the Board level and the Administration has given us presentations since I've been on the board for three years. We are including this discussion in the Strategic Plan that we are starting to take on. It's not to say there's been any decision making, but we have to start to look at all of these pieces and resources. And those are questions that are coming up as we plan for the future and what the future of education looks like. Again, no predisposed decisions. I live in Greenfield, and we vote the budget down often. Everyone says to me: "*why are my taxes up?*" We could look at some options. I don't know if closing schools is an option. "*Don't do that!*" Okay. Then we have to start somewhere, and we don't know definitively what the cost savings would be because if we allocate resources to give every child the equitable education that they could have and optimize that so we are having World Language in younger grades, for example, there is still a cost to that. We have more people moving in because we are a stronger District, perhaps, because we can offer more. It's hard to say. We are looking at that because we all are concerned with this very topic of affordability and educational outcomes and where they're intersecting and how these buildings are playing into that... if they are even playing into it... IF.

Stephen Ullman: Let me repeat myself. There is a perception that middle school teachers sometimes think they know what elementary school produced the child on the basis of the child's performance in a particular subject area - and that's just anecdotal.

Committee Chair: I want to thank Kimberly, Lori and Katherine for joining us. Unless there's anything else, is there a motion to adjourn?

Committee Member: Is there anything else you wanted to share with us, Kimberly?

Kimberly Rizzo Saunders: We are going to get ready to potentially be able to do some symptomatic testing so we can keep kids in school, but that won't start for a while.

Committee Member: You mentioned a budget cap of 2%?

Kimberly Rizzo Saunders: Yes. That is the budget, that is not the Teachers' Contract.

Stephen Ullman: The Teachers' Contract is separate and will be voted on separately under a Warrant Article.

5. Adjourn

Bob Marshall motioned to adjourn at 8:00 p.m. George Willard second. Unanimous

Respectfully submitted,

Judy Miskelly