

Budget Strategies Task Force Minutes of the September 1, 2015 meeting

Attending: Maryanne Bilodeau, Anne Wilson, Ellen Joachim, Fred Floru, Susan Berry, Radha Gargeya, Bella Wong, Lucie St. George, and Chuck Woodard

Chair Susan Berry called the meeting to order at 6:05PM.

Meeting schedule: Next meeting will be September 16 at 7:30AM.

Minutes Minutes for the meetings of June 22 and July 6 were approved by unanimous consent.

Historical Data Information is still being gathered and collated.

Results of interviews with other communities that have a regional high school

Interview notes can be input into a group spreadsheet (link provided by Anne Wilson) or sent in a Word file to chair Susan Berry.

OOD Budgeting Alternatives: Susan Berry suggested creating a separate budget for OOD costs outside of the school operating budgets. She felt that we had to start the conversation somewhere and how do we make those funds move with the kids?

Chuck Woodard expressed concern that responsibility for managing this major cost might as a result be diluted.

Bella Wong and Anne Wilson pointed out that they are motivated first by what is best for the child, and only secondarily by cost. Bella Wong noted that Lincoln would have to go along and budget the same way.

Chuck Woodard thought that it might be counter to State law which requires bottom line approval of school budgets, with cost allocations at the discretion of the school committees only.

Bella Wong noted that the idea seemed counter to a superintendent's need to manage all of the budget resources allocated to the school in what she believes to be the best interests of the children.

Possible Budget Allocation Alternatives: Chuck Woodard offered the following suggestion as a starting point for discussion:

- Ignore the current allocation.
- Ask each Cost Center to submit a "modified level services" budget defined as follows:
 - Level staff for Town.
 - Level ratio of staff to in-house students for the schools.
 - Use the lowest COLA obligation of the three cost centers to calculate the year over year COLA increase in salaries.
 - Don't automatically send more tax dollars to the cost centers with the higher COLAs.
 - All other expenses as expected including OOD costs net of reimbursements.
 - All cost centers to use the same assumptions for similar cost items.
 - No new services or initiatives.

- And then make your case to the FinCom for any additional budget dollars, which would likely include the justification for a higher COLA than the other cost centers where applicable.

A robust discussion ensued.

Ellen Joachim said she did not agree with some of Chuck's aspects. For instance, the lowest COLA is not right because we can't all bargain together and we have to bargain in good faith. She also feels that we can't maintain excellent schools if you keep doing the same thing. She likes the premise that he would suggest we look at each cost centers needs

Bella felt that these would be good questions to ask when we do the budgets

Maryanne was concerned with how this would impact us with collective bargaining. We bargained in good faith but based on what we have historically gotten and used that for projections of what was affordable without an override.

Radha said that even though we advocate for our own cost centers we still need to think of the town as a family of three cost centers.

Susan Berry felt that we need to come to an agreement as to what a good starting point is and what a level service budget looks like, which would be a good topic to discuss when we have the results of our survey back.

Feedback from Committees: Chuck Woodard and Ellen Joachim both said they updated their respective boards and they had no feedback to share at this point.

Public Comment: Susan Iuliano suggested with regard to the budget allocation question that the modified level services budget include the expected cost of all special education activities, not just OOD costs, and that any allocation consider the appropriate spread between K-8 and 9-12 costs per student.

Joan Carlton said that as a member of FinCom she feels we need to follow a process that is different than what we've done in the past. As a Finance Committee she'd like us to do better with our guidance letter than we have in the past.

Next meeting: Scheduled for September 16 at 7:30AM in the Flynn Building. We will discuss the results of interviews with other towns and continue the discussion of possible budget allocation alternatives.

Radha Gargeya moved to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Fred Floru. The motion passed unanimously.