

Dighton~Rehoboth Regional District School Committee
Public Hearing of the FY '15 Budget ~ March 11, 2014

A Public Hearing of the FY '15 Budget of the Dighton~Rehoboth Regional School Committee was held on March 11, 2014, in the Dighton~Rehoboth Regional High School library.

Present:

Richard Barrett
Christopher Andrade
Tiffany Bartholomew
Eliza Couture
Peter Hebda
David Katseff
Susan Lorenz
Raymond Medeiros
Timothy Rapoza
Janice Terry

Also:

Michael Malone, Interim Superintendent of Schools
Gail Van Buren, Asst. Superintendent of Schools
Catherine Antonellis, District Business Administrator
Kellie Fagan, Recording Secretary

Mr. Medeiros stated that the committee would enter into open session at 6:35 PM, and was being broadcast and recorded with the help of the Rehoboth Cable Advisory Board.

Mr. Medeiros led the committee in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. Medeiros stated that the committee would give the Public Hearing of the FY '15 budget proposal:

Agenda Item #3, Public Hearing of the FY '15 Budget:

Mr. Malone gave a brief history of the budget compilation for FY '15:

- ✓ The preparation began in October
- ✓ All principals sent in their personnel requests and class sizes
- ✓ The Capital Projects Task Force was consulted
- ✓ District technology needs were identified
- ✓ The Special Education program was reviewed for reorganization
- ✓ The SIMS and TLC programs were consolidated
- ✓ A Director of Buildings, Grounds, and Operations was proposed

Maintenance budget general information:

- ✓ Proposed 5.65% increase for a total of \$1,986,166.00
- ✓ Increase in salaries = \$1,228,714.00
- ✓ Full-day kindergarten is in this budget (split between Dighton and Rehoboth)
- ✓ Gas and utilities prices have been increased (25% gas and 10% electric)
- ✓ Health insurance increase = 6%
- ✓ Bristol county increase of = 4%
- ✓ Total personnel requests = (\$10,405.00)

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Mr. Malone reviewed personnel changes for the proposed budget:

- ✓ Dighton Elementary: increase Psychologist by .5; increase Adjustment Counselor by .5; and decrease one Special Education teacher
- ✓ Dighton Middle School: increase Psychologist by .5; decrease Adjustment Counselor by .5; and decrease one Portuguese teacher
- ✓ Palmer River: addition of Team Coordinators; and 2 retirements with M-4 replacement
- ✓ Beckwith Middle: addition of one Paraprofessional
- ✓ Dighton~Rehoboth Regional High School: decrease one English teacher due to retirement
- ✓ Total changes in personnel = (\$10,405.00)

Mr. Malone reviewed full-day, tuition-free kindergarten:

- ✓ Dighton will have a total increase = \$79,096.00
- ✓ Rehoboth will have a total increase = \$228,485

Mr. Malone gave the breakdown, by towns, to implement tuition-free, full-day kindergarten.

Mr. Katseff asked about the current full-day kindergarten teacher/paraprofessional salaries. He then asked that, if things stay the same, does that mean the budget figure would decrease. Ms. Antonellis explained that it would for both Rehoboth and Dighton.

Mr. Malone reviewed the current assessments:

- ✓ District minimum local contribution = \$18,051,150
- ✓ Chapter 70 reimbursement increased by \$72,850 (this is a state joint resolution only)
- ✓ Transportation reimbursement was figured as a 4% increase in the budget; however, this percentage is not a definite figure
- ✓ Rehoboth assessments = \$14,970,956
- ✓ Dighton assessment = \$8,620,434
- ✓ Rehoboth over minimum contribution = \$1,800,000
- ✓ Dighton over minimum contribution = \$1,300,000

Mr. Katseff briefly explained the assessment method being used by the district. The statutory method is currently being used for the proposed FY '15 budget; however, the district should research an alternative method.

SCHOOL NARRATIVES:

Dighton Elementary School

- ✓ Priorities: full-day kindergarten; maintaining current class sizes; and to become consistent with the Adjustment Counselors/Guidance department within the district ~ add .5 psychologist

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Palmer River

- ✓ Priorities are: develop a math and literacy continuum delineating the 3 tiers of instruction , assessment, intervention, and progress monitoring; continue to provide coaching and professional development in Tier 1; implement a school-wide system of behavioral expectations and supports; increase the use of technology; and create and administer systematic interventions as necessary

Dighton Middle School

- ✓ Priorities: to provide more consistent student support services with the psychologist increase (.5)

Beckwith Middle School

- ✓ Priority: to ensure that all students have equal access to all programs; add an after-school inclusion program

Dighton~Rehoboth Regional High School

- ✓ Priority: need to decrease personnel by one English teacher, due to retirement

DISTRICT TECHNOLOGY NEEDS:

Mrs. Van Buren included an outline of the technology needs for the district by school in each back-up packet. There is a proposed \$25,000 allotment for technology per school.

Next, Mr. Malone spoke about the full-day kindergarten petition. He would like a copy of this petition.

Mrs. Lorenz asked if is it mandatory that you send your child to full-day kindergarten if it is offered within your town. Mr. Malone recommended that every child should go to full-day kindergarten.

Mr. Malone stated that some kindergarten grants are available through the state; however, they are “planning” grants, for those school systems that are in the planning phase only. He noted that there may be a possibility that this type of request could be used as a “curriculum” planning grant.

Mr. Medeiros noted that our Chapter 70 funding for full-day kindergarten does not come in until a full year has been completed of the new program. He also noted that the district does not receive Chapter 70 funding for a child that attends ½ day kindergarten (must be a full-day enrollment).

Mr. Rapoza stated that technology leadership is lacking in this district (going to be the addition of PARCC). He suggested that the committee take a look at the proposed budget allowances for electrical/plumbing services in order to find additional technology funds.

Mrs. Terry asked if this budget proposal (5.65% increase) replaces the proposal of February 25, 2014. Mr. Malone stated that this replaces the February 25th proposal with personnel reductions, etc.

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Mr. Malone will meet with the full administration team tomorrow to assess budget priorities. The prior proposal is off the table.

Mrs. Lorenz inquired about no custodial reductions. Mr. Malone explained that there is a proposal to share our custodians with the town water district(s); this may offset the budget. Mr. Malone stated that the proposed budget is a level-service budget.

Mrs. Bartholomew stated that she is more comfortable with the 5.65% increase. She does not want to see the district to go too low with a proposal ~ there were too many reductions in the original, proposed 2.2% budget increase.

Mr. Malone would like to see a budget slightly lower than a 5.65% increase.

Mr. Rapoza asked if full-day kindergarten is a definite in the budget. Mr. Medeiros stated that it has not been voted yet. Mr. Medeiros stated that discussion will continue before any budget is voted.

Mr. Medeiros does not recommend reducing personnel or student services. Look for places to reduce the budget by consolidation, etc., without hurting services to our children and staff. Need to make a case to the towns to support the proposed budget that is voted on.

Mrs. Terry asked that the next budget proposal be included in the packets for the next meeting (March 25, 2014 meeting). Mr. Malone stated that he and Ms. Antonellis will have a proposal in the next packet. Mr. Malone noted that he is looking at technology for the next proposal.

Mr. Rapoza discussed the "sharing" of personnel (electrician/plumber, technology director, etc.) with the towns. It has been done successfully in other districts/school systems. We can use a "charge" system associated with sharing the personnel. The district will employ the personnel, but could "charge" individuals out to the towns. Mr. Malone noted that the plumber/electrician would both be licensed, and could perform other duties for both the schools and towns.

Mr. Katseff stated that if we take out full-day kindergarten, the Director of Buildings, Grounds, and Operations, and the electrician/plumber, there will be a \$563,000 decrease in the budget. Without these services, town assessments would go down to approximately 1 million dollars.

Mr. Katseff reviewed the budget process for setting the budget and for voting the assessments. He questioned whether the district can live with the statutory method of assessing, or should we research an alternative method of assessment. In his opinion, the towns need to start looking at an alternative method.

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Mrs. Bartholomew addressed the committee regarding the full-day kindergarten tuitions. She asked if the tuition amount is covering our costs for full-day kindergarten. Mr. Katseff stated that the tuition amount was calculated so that full-day kindergarten would be a "break even" situation.

Mr. Malone asked for committee direction on whether or not they would like to see full-day, tuition-free kindergarten.

Committee discussion continued on full-day kindergarten.

Mrs. Bartholomew addressed the committee stating her support of full-day kindergarten. Mrs. Couture expressed her support, as well. Mr. Malone noted that community members must go to the town meetings and vote to support this program.

Mr. Hebda suggested that this is not the year to go to tuition-free, full-day kindergarten; we are in a financial crisis situation.

Mr. Rapoza offered some options for maintaining a full-day kindergarten program. He also noted that a Director of Buildings, Grounds, and Operations position is critical to the district.

Mr. Rapoza noted that an electrician/plumber can be contracted out, while the much-needed increase in district technology cannot.

Mr. Andrade addressed the public regarding attendance at town meeting(s). This is where the budget vote takes place and the school district needs community support.

Mrs. Lorenz addressed the committee regarding the Director of Buildings, Grounds, and Operations position. She felt that this position would be beneficial for our roof repair projects, as well as for future facilities maintenance.

Mrs. Couture clarified that the MSBA does provide a project manager for the roof repair projects. We do, however, need a Director of Buildings, Grounds, and Operations for general maintenance in the district.

Mr. Hebda noted that the Palmer River Elementary School is in dyer need of repairs; a facilities director would be beneficial.

Mrs. Bartholomew reiterated that if the Palmer River Elementary School is accepted into the MSBA CORE Program, there must be a \$500,000-\$1,000,000 commitment made from the district to MSBA. The commitment vote for the Statement of Interest (SOI) will be put onto the next agenda (March 25, 2014).

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Mr. Katseff is not convinced that going to the towns for more money, if we are accepted into the program, is a good idea at this point in time. This request may not be supported by the towns. Mrs. Lorenz agreed with Mr. Katseff, and does not think the committee should go forward with the MSBA SOI.

Mr. Rapoza would like to see the committee go forward with the MSBA SOI for Palmer River.

Mr. Medeiros stated that discussion will continue at the March 25th School Committee meeting.

PUBLIC INPUT ON THE BUDGET:

Alicen Adams, Dighton parent, addressed the committee regarding full-day kindergarten (tuition-free) at Dighton Elementary School. She read a petition supporting the addition of a full-day kindergarten program, beginning in the 2014-2015 school year.

Mr. Jefferson, Dighton, asked about the sharing of custodians and hiring a plumber with the water district. Mr. Jefferson asked if the School Committee decides the budget that is put onto the town(s) warrant. Mr. Malone stated the committee does; however, the town's Finance Committee has the authority to change the budget number on town meeting floor. Mr. Jefferson also spoke about the minimum contribution differences between Dighton and Rehoboth, and whether the money given by Dighton over the local contribution requirement, can be used for Dighton's K-8 only.

Ms. Antonellis explained the process for both towns accepting the budget.

Mr. Katseff addressed the committee regarding the assessment methods (statutory vs. alternative).

Mr. Hebda discussed the Chapter 70 investigation, wherein our assessment methodology was reviewed. The end result was that the assessments came to approximately a 60/40 split, which is correct. He also noted that both towns would be worse off, if there was no regional school district.

Various parents continued to address the committee regarding full-day kindergarten. Parents feel that this should be a budget priority.

Ralph Answitch, Rehoboth resident, suggested the School Committee explain to the public what was wrong with the past method of assessing the towns. The communities need to have figures to review. This information needs to be conveyed to both communities.

Patrick Menges, Dighton Board of Selectman, addressed the committee regarding the town of Dighton's funding to the public schools, Dighton property values, and the Chapter 70 correction.

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He stressed that we need to keep the peace between the towns. We need a facilities director and full-day, tuition-free kindergarten. He feels that no one should be denied this education, due to financial hardship.

Mr. Medeiros asked Mr. Malone if he is still looking to the School Committee for direction on “don’t touch” areas of the budget. Mr. Malone said that he is. Mr. Medeiros asked the committee for their important budget areas by consensus only, not a formal vote:

- ✓ Keep the Director of Buildings, Grounds, and Operations in the proposed budget? Yes, by consensus
- ✓ Keep full-day kindergarten in the proposed budget? Yes, by consensus
- ✓ Any cuts in the budget shall come from efficiency outside of the classrooms (staff and student programs come first) ~ yes, by consensus

Mr. Katseff addressed the proposed budget increase. The School Committee needs to be realistic; the assessment increases will not be supported by the towns. He suggested that the Superintendent come back with a budget reduced by a certain money amount, that will be set by the School Committee.

Mr. Malone intends to reduce the budget from the 5.65% proposed increase to something between 3% and 4%.

Mrs. Bartholomew stated that the district needs to pick the best educational system for our students, and then determine the cost of that system.

Mrs. Lorenz said that the School Committee needs to present a true indicator of reductions, in order for the public to say “what can we support and afford”?

Stephen Patrick, DRRTA Co-Chair, asked what the next step is for the reorganization plan. Need to know what that proposed reorganization looks like from a staff perspective. Please come back with a plan for this reorganization (job descriptions, who, where, etc.). Have to look at the whole picture for school-wide student support.

Wendy DeClerque, Dighton, asked about the joint resolution. If it is not approved, then is the district counting on funds that are not secured yet. Ms. Antonellis explained that this budget proposal is the “best case scenario”, which includes the monies in the joint resolution.

Mr. Malone stated that E & D funds have not been certified, however, the amount is approximately \$1.6 million dollars. Mr. Malone explained what E & D means (Excess and Deficiency Fund) ~ this is a fund set up so that if there is ever a time that the district starts the year without a budget, the

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district could meet certain financial obligations for a couple of weeks. E & D should be used as an emergency fund for crisis situations.

Mr. Rapoza explained that the E & D should not be used to balance a budget; it takes a long time to re-build the money in that account.

Seeing no further discussion of the budget, Mr. Medeiros announced a 5 minute recess for the committee, and that they would return to the Regular Session portion of the School Committee meeting at 8:45 PM.

Janíce Terry, Secretary