

Natick Public Schools
SCHOOL COMMITTEE MINUTES
March 14, 2015

The School Committee held a meeting on Saturday, March 14, 2015 at 9:00 a.m. in the School Committee Room, 3rd Floor, Town Hall. Chair Mistrot called the meeting to order at 9:10 a.m.

Members Present: Tom Campbell, Dirk Coburn, Paul Laurent, David Margil, Amy Mistrot, Firkins Reed

Anne Blanchard arrived at 9:35 a.m.

Others present: Peter Sanchioni Superintendent of Schools
Anna Nolin Assistant Superintendent
Timothy Luff Director of Student Services

FY'16 Budget Discussion

Chair Mistrot provided the School Committee with a FY'16 Budget Worksheet which outlined the various budget proposals discussed to date.

FY'15 Approved Budget Appropriation	\$51,494,817
1 st FY'16 Budget Appropriation Proposal	\$55,362,217
2 nd FY'16 Budget Appropriation Proposal	\$54,340,059
Current FY'16 Budget Appropriation from the Town	\$52,517,197
Deficit	(\$1,822,862)

Chair Mistrot stated that at the meeting of March 9, Dr. Sanchioni articulated a full list of cuts that would make up the \$1.8M deficit if no additional funds were available. Chair Mistrot provided a spreadsheet outlining where things stood today after collaborations with Town Administration so the Committee could discuss, make decisions in real time, and accurately articulate a budget appropriation request for approval for the FY'16 budget.

Dr. Sanchioni reviewed the rationale for the most needed positions that he recommends adding into the budget as follows:

- 1 Kennedy Middle School Special Education Teacher
- 1 NHS Dean
- .9 ELL (.5 at Kennedy and .4 at NHS)
- 1 Social Worker NHS
- 1 Nurse split between Kennedy & Brown
- 1 Kennedy Middle School Teacher
- 1 HS English Teacher

He stated that the addition of these positions does not address the full needs of the system but these are the highest priorities within the additional funding that the town hopes to be able to provide to address our budget shortfall. He believes there may be changes to the overall fiscal picture between now and July 1st. If additional

funding is made available, he would like to add more positions from the 13.1 FTEs requested in the level service budget proposal.

Comments/Concerns raised

- This is bare bones budget – needs aren't being met – loss of level service – falling behind
- This budget is not a compromise, it is real damage
- HS Dean position is a real need with the enrollment growth and complexity of the building. School Committee met previously in Executive Session to strategize negotiations for this position and a commitment for this position was made with full Committee support.
- High School English teacher is a critical need – class sizes and caseloads are currently too high to allow for adequate student feedback on their work.
- Fees still need to be addressed.
- Athletic programs for middle school and freshmen could still be discussed for possible “savings” to create funding for more teaching positions.
- If activity fees are put into effect, consistency of collecting needs to be addressed.

A discussion was held about the proposed athletic fees and parking fees. Dr. Sanchioni reported that our athletic fees are the lowest in the Baystate League and raising them from \$150 to \$225 would still be appropriate. Raising hockey to \$400 is recommended due to cost of ice time – the cost per student for hockey is much higher than any other sport due to \$50,000 spent procuring ice time.

There is financial assistance available for families who qualify for free and reduced lunch.

Issues of parking fees were raised:

- Enforcement burden
- May become a problem for neighbors where students would be parking in area neighborhoods.
- Police enforcement may be an issue if students park on neighborhood streets.
- What percentage of student drivers are seniors, juniors?
- Signage may be required by DPW
- Financial burden
- Would funds from parking have to go into towns general fund or should revolving account be set up?

A discussion of fees in general took place as to whether or not to consider sunseting the fees at the end of the next school year with the hope that there will be a better budget scenario the following year.

The option for increased transportation fees was discussed. Dr. Sanchioni explained that increasing transportation fees would not result in savings to the school system because of the three-tiered funding mechanism for transportation. Increased transportation fees to families would ultimately just lower the amount needed from the school bus subsidy that the town provides. It may be worthwhile to review how the bus subsidy could be used for future years, but increased bus fees would not help the school budget this fiscal year; therefore, it is not recommended to raise the bus fee currently as it would only cause families additional financial burden with no benefit to the bottom line.

Mr. Coburn inquired about only offering bus service for that which is mandated (Grades K-6 over 2 miles). Chair Mistrot referenced a memorandum which was provided to the School Committee from Mr. Hurley outlining in detail the reasons why that would not be recommended.

See excerpt from Mr. Hurley's memorandum below read by Chair Mistrot:

Question: What would the savings be if we only provided the minimum mandated transportation to students in Natick?

Answer: This would only include providing transportation to K-6 students that reside more than 2.0 miles from their assigned school. All other K-6 students that reside under 2.0 miles and all students in grades 7-12 would need to get to school on their own. This is not so easy to quantify and as the school department does not have routing software which makes it difficult to run simulations on the impact. However, looking at our current ridership levels and knowing the distances to schools and knowing who is currently eligible for free transportation currently, we can approximate the impact.

The other key points for consideration are the impact on families, the impact on traffic in the Town and School sites not designed to handle this volume and the impact on students getting to and from schools safely and timely. Another key consideration is that the school department would lose the \$300,000 in bus fee revenue from families that are currently paying and would also lose the \$371,573 from the Town subsidy which was set up to keep fees affordable. The \$300,000 generated from family fees essentially covers the cost of 5 buses per year (\$325 per day X 180 days= \$58,500 per bus per year.)

Looking at our current total ridership levels over the last several years, it is clear that ridership continues to grow as our enrollment grows:

*FY12: 2,919 total registered riders
 FY13: 3,030 total registered riders
 FY14: 3,119 total registered riders
 FY15: 3,158 total registered riders*

We know that we collect revenue from approximately 2,000 of the riders. The remaining riders are either free or reduced (and therefore do not pay a fee) or are K-6 students residing within 2.0 miles from their assigned school. For this exercise, I am going to assume that we would be mandated to transport 664 of the current riders or a 79% decrease in ridership. This is based on our current ridership of eligible students that would qualify (please remember, 7-12 students would not be eligible at all). The challenging part is to estimate the number of buses required to transport these students to the elementary schools and middle schools. Given the close start of school times, town size, location of schools and trying to take into account traffic becomes quite challenging. I would estimate that rather than needing 21 buses, we would still need between 6 and 10 buses. The current number of buses now and projected at each elementary and middle levels is the critical piece here as the buses are needed within close time frames:

<i>School</i>	<i>Current Total Registered Rider</i>	<i>Current # of buses per school</i>	<i>Estimated Mandated Riders</i>	<i>Projected # of buses if mandated only transportation</i>
<i>Ben Hem</i>	<i>346</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>124</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Brown</i>	<i>182</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Johnson</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>6 (Homeless)</i>	<i>1 Van</i>
<i>Lilja</i>	<i>236</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>32</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Memorial</i>	<i>382</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>239</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Kennedy</i>	<i>458</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>95 (5th & 6th Gr)</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Wilson</i>	<i>682</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>164 (5th & 6th Gr)</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>High School</i>	<i>832</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>

Totals	3,158		664	
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At a minimum we would need 6 buses to transport students to the Middle Schools. However, at the elementary level, it appears that we would like need to have 10 buses. This would be 3 dedicated buses for Ben Hem, 1 bus shared for Brown and Johnson, 1 bus for Lilja and 5 buses for Memorial. The Memorial start is later than the other elementary schools, so it possible that we would double up on one of the other buses and possibly need less than 10 buses if the timing could work.

If we assumed we still needed 10 buses for mandated school bus transportation for 664 students, that would be a gross cost \$585,000 compared with our current “gross cost” of \$1,253,836 for FY16. However, the school department would no longer receive:

- 1) *Bus Fee Revenue:* \$300,000
- 2) *Town Transportation Subsidy:* \$371,573 for FY16 receive the Town subsidy
- 3) **TOTAL OFFSETS:** **\$671,573**

This \$671,573 reduces our gross bus cost down to the appropriated request of \$582,263. Therefore, the cost to provide the mandated busing of 10 buses at \$585,000 is remarkably similar to the cost net appropriated cost of providing the full level of service. We would not recommend providing the minimum mandated busing requirement. It does not sufficiently help reduce our costs but more importantly creates a traffic and safety issue for the Town and schools that were not designed to handle this amount of parent traffic.

The impact of eliminating the non-mandated busing would increase traffic, burden on families, and there is no net financial impact.

The question of increasing rental fees came up. Dr. Sanchioni explained that facility rentals were just increased last year and most of the rentals are for our town sports teams. Ultimately, the increased cost would be born by families and the impact would be small so is not recommended.

Mr. Coburn suggested raising the athletic fees even higher, to possibly \$240/sport, in order to support more than the 6.9 critical positions. Ms. Reed asked if other areas could be reviewed for further reductions - i.e., technology, secretaries - in order to add more teaching positions.

Given the time, Chair Mistrot stated that further discussion on fees would be held at a future meeting. The NPS budget is predicated on \$150, 000 in funding from fees, which is a commitment that must be honored. However, how and what would comprise that funding source could be finalized at another meeting.

Chair Mistrot asked if members of the public wished to comment on the budget.

Leah Phillips Falzone, Brown School parent of 1st grader and soon to be kindergartner. She doesn't know how to guide the School Committee as we are cutting to the bone. She has been a strong advocate for an additional elementary teacher for next year 2nd grade class but also sees the importance of high school English, reducing the middle school classes down from over 30, dealing with drug addiction and keeping that on track. It's very frustrating to see the difficult decisions that need to be made.

Rich Sidney, Town Meeting member and former Finance Committee member for 8 years. He encouraged the School Committee to vote a specific budget number to be delivered to the Finance Committee, the Board of Selectmen and Town Meeting. It can always be reconsidered later, but it will provide a basis for conversation. He also expressed a concern that funds for the .2 Mandarin position, which was on the cut list is now quietly being funded by found money. He feels these changes made without full transparency become an integrity

issue with the public, Finance Committee, etc. Dr. Sanchioni addressed the question regarding the integrity of the school district and noted that decisions are made in real time, as necessary, and as variables change.

School Committee members supported the decision to fund the .2 Mandarin teacher through additional international tuitions and asked for members of the public to respect that the budget process is being conducted in full good faith. Changes will be shared as new decisions are made.

Mr. Sidney also spoke in favor of a parking fee for high school students.

Mr. John Ciccariello, Natick resident and former Selectmen and Finance Committee member, stated that meetings are not a forum to fuel fire. They are held to try and come up with rational decisions on how to take care of a structural budget deficit. There is a need for School Committee to approve a budget request where the Finance Committee can make a recommendation to Town Meeting. As far as the parking fee is concerned, he stated that the School Committee can adopt a fee, analyze it to see if it's a value, and can ask the Fall Town Meeting to create a revolving fund where NPS could have control of the funds. He stated that it is School Committee's responsibility to make the final decision for what funding is needed. He believes that in the last 3.5 years, the school budget has been more transparent than ever and appreciates all the efforts.

Ms. Kim Aliprantis, parent of 2nd grader at Lilja and one entering kindergarten next year stated that it is sad to listen to the state of finances for education for both the short and long term. She supports any and all fees and knows so many parents that are willing to pay fees. Please consider all fees if it means an additional teacher in the classroom. She also wants to address the longer term challenges. Chair Mistrot indicated that there will be several opportunities in the near future for addressing the long term needs and asked to have comments focused on the immediate budget season given the time constraints of this meeting.

Mr. Jerry Pierce, Natick resident, Town Meeting member and Finance Committee member came forward speaking on his own behalf and stated that we are all volunteers and try to do our best. It is his belief that the Finance Committee has dug deep into all budgets in the town. The School Administration and School Committee have been responsive and transparent. He stated that at no time did Dr. Sanchioni lose sight of the mission to provide all students with the best possible education. He stated that everything is being considered to offset this budget deficit. The Financial Planning Committee will be looking at more revenue generators and is pleased to see the public is willing to help. There are no better allies than the School Committee and administration.

Ms. Corey Dehner, Ben-Hem parent of kindergartner and third grader, came forward. She is glad to see the KEIP program in the budget. She expressed her support of increasing athletic fees to increase teachers. If students are not ready academically, we will go down really fast. Kindergarten is the critical gateway to education. Focus on elementary school grades. She is happy to pay fees.

Ms. Kathy Wick, parent of children in grades 2, 4 & 6. She believes all the teaching positions are critical – tasks may be different but all critical. Without a foundation in elementary grades, more students will end up in special education where the budget will skyrocket. She is in support of raising fees and wants all kids to read well and have a love of education.

Ms. Cathi Collins – Finance Committee member and Chair of the Education Subcommittee announced that the Education Subcommittee will be meeting at 7:30 a.m on March 18. She has a few questions, which she will forward prior to that meeting. The full Finance Committee will review the final, school budget proposal on March 26. She requested that communications be kept open throughout the year when the superintendent sees the need to increase staffing over what was presented in the budget, so there are no surprises.

Mr. Joshua Ostroff, Chair of the Board of Selectmen, came forward speaking on his own behalf. He stated that as the School Committee goes through the budget, it would be helpful if a statement could be made of the impact of additional cuts to the budget - specific program and fees that will impact families of moderate means and outline programs to help them. Please keep Jeff Towne, Deputy Administrator, informed of the status of the school budget so the Selectmen can have an informed discussion on Monday night. The State Legislators will be attending the Selectmen meeting on Monday night to speak on their budget process.

Chair Mistrot indicated that she wished that she had been made aware that the legislators presence was confirmed so the School Committee could have posted a joint meeting. Mr. Ostroff indicated that a joint session with legislators could be scheduled at a later date in order to have a more informed discussion.

Ms. Julie McDonough, Natick resident, came forward and asked what class sizes look like at the high school without the math and science teacher. The class sizes which are already over 25 will increase. She expressed concern that two teachers aren't being funded at Kennedy and the addition of a French teacher with a class size over 30 isn't even the budget.

Chair Mistrot understands the level of anxiety of several positions not being funded but indicated the need for a motion for the FY'16 budget appropriation. She indicated that additional discussion about fees will be held at the next meeting on 3/23 so that the public had adequate time to learn about the fee proposal and respond with questions or concerns prior to a final decision. Transparency is a major priority so that families are aware of any changes before they are approved.

After discussing the best approach to formulate the motion(s), Ms. Blanchard moved to approve the FY'16 School Budget Appropriation in the amount of \$53,817,355. Mr. Campbell seconded.

Ms. Blanchard made an additional motion for the School Committee to request an additional appropriation should funding be made available, whether in whole or in part, in the amount of \$332,704 for the outstanding 6.2 positions that were requested as part of a level-service budget that were not included in the \$53,817,355 appropriation request. Mr. Laurent seconded.

Chair Mistrot called for a vote on Ms Blanchard's motion to approve the FY'16 School Budget Appropriation in the amount of \$53,817,355. Ms. Blanchard, Ms. Mistrot, Mr. Campbell and Mr. Laurent voted in favor. Ms. Reed, Mr. Coburn, Mr. Margil voted against as they believe the budget request should be higher.

Chair Mistrot called for a vote on the second motion for the School Committee to request an additional appropriation should funding be made available, whether in whole or in part, in the amount of \$332,704 for the outstanding 6.2 positions that were requested as part of a level-service budget that were not included in the \$53,817,355 appropriation request. Six members were in favor, Mr. Coburn abstained. Mr. Coburn wants to support a higher level amount as he believes the rights and responsibility of the School Committee and Administration is eroded when the budget is voted in increments.

At 12:40 p.m., Mr. Laurent moved to adjourn. Mr. Campbell seconded. It was unanimously approved.

Attest: _____

Peter Sanchioni, Ph.D.
Superintendent
Secretary to the School Committee

Sharon Reilly
Recording Secretary

Documents handed out
FY'16 Budget Spreadsheet