

BEDFORD SCHOOL COMMITTEE MINUTES OF

December 1, 2009

1. Call to Order

At 7:30 p.m., Mr. Pierce called to order, the meeting of the Bedford School Committee. Other members present included Ms. Bickford, Ms. Seibert, Ms. O’Gara and Mr. Hafer. Ms. Anne Dickinson Meltz, student representative, was also present.

2. Comments

None

3. Presentation: FY’11 School Budget

Dr. LaCroix presented the 2011 Operating Budget Request to the School Committee. She described the budget as being a “Maintenance of Services Budget”, which means moving forward with the current programs into the 2011-2012 school year. Dr. LaCroix thanked her Administrative Team, especially Mr. Coelho, for their hard work in preparing this budget request.

Dr. LaCroix began by describing the guidelines used by the Team in creating this budget request. The guidelines are:

- Recognize the Town’s fiscal restraints (sixth fiscal year where the school budget has been built on a lean base)
- Limit Program Administrators increase to 0% for FY’11
- Continue use of available offsets
- Maintain the following Cost Center structures:
 - core services
 - utility budget
 - special education out-of-district placements
 - early retirement incentive
 - transportation contract

Dr. LaCroix also noted that another contractual, legally mandated and economically sensitive costs continue to drive the budget.

Dr. LaCroix pointed out that the budget development is based on known out-of-district students and this estimate includes some risk because this area can fluctuate.

Dr. LaCroix said that the Administrative Team tried to reorganize services where possible to reduce staff and to allow for addition of new staff to meet critical needs. Therefore, one change for the 2011-2012 school year is to eliminate seven teaching assistant positions at Davis and Lane schools. Also, as part of this change in teaching assistant deployment, a Behaviorist will be hired to work at Davis and Lane. Dr. LaCroix explained that over the last several years, the population at these schools requires having someone on staff with the training to help children, staff and families with social and emotional issues. According to Dr. LaCroix, the addition of a Behaviorist will help the Bedford keep students with special needs in district.

Other personnel changes that are recommended are:

- elimination of .8 Kindergarten Teacher and .8 Educational Assistant
- add Grade one Teacher to accommodate class of 187 students.
- Add an Instructional Coach for math (at Lane School)
- Eliminate a .5 Custodian
- Add a .5 Technician for Technology Support
- Add a .2 ELL Tutor

To summarize the changes in personnel:

- FY'10 had 240.9 professional staff and FY'11 is proposed to have 243.1 professional staff positions.
- FY'10 had 119.2 para-professional staff and FY'11 is proposed to have 112.1 para-professional staff positions.

Dr. LaCroix said that budget assumes that enrollment will remain relatively flat for 2011-2012. The enrollment study consultant is expected to present the updated enrollment projections at the next School Committee meeting.

Dr. LaCroix pointed out that several important challenges exist. They include revenue deficits in State "pothole" and "circuit breaker" funds. Also, several local offsets, such as the Hockey Fund and METCO grant, have been fully utilized.

The total FY'11 request is as follows:

Core Services	\$25,721,493
Staff Retirements	\$ 37,611
SPED ODD	\$ 6,043,788
Utilities	\$ 978,297
Grand Total	\$32,781,189

Dr. LaCroix explained that the percentage change over last fiscal year in each category is:

Core Service	5.75%
Staff Retirements	-70.20%
SPED ODD	6.75%
Utilities	.91%
Grand Total	5.40%

Dr. LaCroix commented that she is pleased to see the SPED ODD budget finally being contained. She said this is a result of a five year concerted effort to keep students in Bedford. Some steps taken to do this include hiring an Assistant Director of Special Education to monitor ODD placements and creating in-district programs. Examples of these programs include the Language Learning Lab at each school, JGMS Transitions Program (for emotional, behavioral, and cognitive difficulties), BHS Integrated Preschool, BHS Rise Program, and the Bridges Program for 8th graders moving into the High School.

Dr. LaCroix said that the district will continue to refine the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process and will improve regular education services. Also, the district will

continue to utilize its membership in the three collaboratives – LABBB, CASE and EDCO.

Dr. LaCroix pointed out that despite these good efforts, 62.42% of the FY'11 SPED budget is for ODD expenses which is 18.44% of the total FY'11 expenses. (A 72.28% growth rate since FY'04)

Dr. LaCroix said she expected Circuit Breaker aid from the State to be very low. The assumption used in the FY'11 budget is 35% and this does not include transportation reimbursement. She said she expects all offsets for FY'11 to be lower than FY'10.

Overall, Dr. LaCroix summarized the FY'11 budget risks:

- State aid/offsets are way down
- Building rentals are stagnant due to the local economic situation
- Assume no new ODD placements
- No control over ODD tuition costs
- No control over student movements into Bedford

Also, Dr. LaCroix warned that after 2011, the district will be challenged to support ongoing replacement of computers because the BHS project was the most recent funding source for all of current BHS computers.

Dr. LaCroix finally presented a list of desired items that did not make the 2011 budget request:

- Adding a 5th day of Kindergarten
- No additional FTE's despite increasing enrollments at Lane, JGMS and BHS
- Literacy Coach for Davis School
- Resources to begin an Excel Program at JGMS
- Facility changes to accommodate new programs at Davis, Lane and JGMS
- Increases in professional development and summer studies
- Fulltime technology support
- Funding for adding Mandarin language
- Funding for strategic planning
- Additional teacher for ELL (population is changing at Bedford especially at Davis)

Dr. LaCroix also reminded the School Committee about the federal and state mandates that exist without additional funding:

- No Child Left Behind/MCAS exams
- McKinney Vento (homeless student obligations)
- ELL requirements including teacher training and document translation
- Crisis prevention and training
- Restraint Training
- Data requirements and reporting

The next step for the Budget process is to articulate what impacts would be for a level funded budget in response to recent Finance Committee discussions. This will be presented at the next School Committee meeting on December 8th.

Dr. LaCroix said that the School Committee will have the opportunity to meet again with Fiscal Planning Committee along with all of the other town departments. She reminded everyone about how fortunate we are in Bedford to be able to work together in fiscal planning.

Dr. LaCroix ended her presentation by summarizing the challenge that faces the Bedford Public Schools:

"To maintain the quality of the programs that the community expects as we move through a fiscal crisis."

School Committee members had a chance to ask questions and request additional information

Ms. O'Gara thanked Dr. LaCroix for putting the budget into context and for clarifying the special education costs. Ms. O'Gara noted that it seems like the schools pick up the costs of required medical needs of our special education students whenever needed. Dr. LaCroix said that this is true and that there is a battle going on at the State level to see which agency should be responsible.

Ms. O'Gara asked about the effect of having less staff in the classrooms with reductions in elementary teaching assistants. Dr. LaCroix said conversations are underway right now. She believes a Behaviorist is truly needed to help the Davis and Lane school families and teachers. This change fits in the Response to Intervention model.

Ms. Bickford noted that when comparing this year's budget presentation to last year's, there is good news in the non-salary portion of the budget.

Ms. Bickford asked Dr. LaCroix to quantify the in-house special education programs – how many students, what is the average out-of-district cost, how much have we saved. Mr. Coelho agreed to work on this analysis.

Ms. Bickford also asked Mr. Coelho to report the increase in line items if the offsets did not decrease for 2011. He agreed.

Ms. Bickford asked about the qualifications of a Behaviorist. Dr. LaCroix said someone with a degree in Psychology, with a Special Education license would be ideal.

Ms. Bickford said that it is remarkable that once again, the utility increase is so low. She asked that the School Committee see an analysis on how Mr. Jones's estimates were developed. Mr. Jones agreed to provide this information.

Ms. Seibert asked for more information from Mr. Coelho on the offset account balances and to see budget v. actual. Mr. Coelho agreed.

Mr. Hafer said he would send specific request for information directly to Dr. LaCroix and Mr. Coelho.

Mr. Pierce asked for more information on the computer purchasing plan, substitute teacher usage by school and to cost-out programs not included in the budget requests.

Ms. Dickinson Meltz pointed out that she thought the Math coach was a good idea especially if the role was to support students and teachers. She did ask how a Behaviorist differed from a Guidance Counselor. Dr. LaCroix said a Behaviorist focuses on the needs of children in school and at home. The population at Davis and Lane for the last five years has demanded this change.

Ms. Bickford asked for clarification on the teaching assistant change and for information on the JGMS program in place this year. Dr. LaCroix said she would have Cyndy Taymor, Director of Special Education, prepare this information.

Meredith McCulloch, an audience member from the Finance Committee, asked if building rentals is a net income. Mr. Coelho said yes. She also asked how we put pressure on the state to control tuitions charged by out-of-district special education schools. Dr. LaCroix said conversations with State Representatives.

Ms. Bickford reminded Mr. Kenney, a member of the Finance Committee who is liaison with Shawsheen Tech., that we need to work with Shawsheen Tech to see that they are held to the same level of budget restraint we are experiencing.

Ms. O'Gara asked Mr. Coelho why we see dramatic tuition fluctuations each year. Mr. Coelho said that the cycle of tuition freezes creates the volatility.

4. Superintendent's Report

None

5. Liaison Reports

None

6. Minutes

None

7. Future Agenda

Budget discussions will continue.

8. Adjournment

Ms Seibert made the following motion:

MOVED: Motion to adjourn at 9:35 p.m.

MOTION SECONDED by Ms. Bickford

MOTION APPROVED: 5-0

Roll Call Vote:

Mr. Pierce	Yes
Ms. Seibert	Yes
Mr. Hafer	Yes
Ms. Bickford	Yes
Ms. O'Gara	Yes

School Committee Secretary

Date

BEDFORD SCHOOL COMMITTEE

**EXECUTIVE SEESION
MINUTES OF**

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