

Minutes of the Hingham Advisory Committee Education Subcommittee

February 10, 2021

Remote meeting via Zoom

Chair Dave Anderson called the meeting to order at 7:00pm. He read the following statement:

This meeting is being held remotely as an alternate means of public access pursuant to an Order issued by the Governor of Massachusetts dated March 12, 2020 Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law. You are hereby advised that this meeting and all communications during this meeting may be recorded by the Town of Hingham in accordance with the Open Meeting Law. If any participant wishes to record this meeting, please notify the chair at the start of the meeting in accordance with M.G.L. c. 30A, § 20(f) so that the chair may inform all other participants of said recording.

ACES members present: Dave Anderson, Andrew McElaney, Evan Sheehan, Eryn Kelley, George Danis

School Committee Members present: Kerry Ni, Carlos Da Silva, Libby Lewiecki, Liza O'Reilly, Michelle Ayer, Nes Correnti, Jen Benham

HPS Administration present: Paul Austin, John Ferris

Dave Anderson Chair of ACES reported that the ACES subcommittee makes a recommendation to the full Advisory Committee regarding the school budget and is here tonight to discuss their thoughts.

Evan Sheehan expressed that the Town is in a position to find creative ways to fill a \$7M shortfall in the overall town budget.

Andy McElaney stated that has not been persuaded that the Recovery Budget does not include more items than what we need to get people up to where we were before the pandemic. The presentation on SPED did not present data to suggest the extra positions are needed. Nor was there data to point to needing more positions for regular ED. He requested data to bring to Ad Com.

Dr. LaBillois advised that there is historic data showing discrepancies in achievement in subgroups. E. Sheehan this is not like the DPW budget that can cover hours at the transfer station. Education has intangibles. Have to assume positive intent from Dr. Austin and Dr. LaBillois to tell us what they need.

Kerry Ni added that the SPED subcommittee has discussed the budget in depth. This data is clear that academically and socially emotionally children are suffering during a pandemic. Referrals are up requiring more specialized instruction to close the gaps.

Dave Anderson opined that professional educators have anecdotal information about negative impacts but that asking for data is a fair request.

Dr. Austin concurred. We have exceptional educators. When a child goes on summer break there is a regression. Our students have missed a lot of time since March. We absolutely expect a regression, and we need robust intervention. There has been a much greater request for referrals for special ed. 40% of parents are concerned that their children have regressed. We anticipate those who already have IEPs will have even greater needs, and there are more who will be on IEPs than before.

Evan Sheehan referenced Dr LaBillois' presentation showing achievement gap for SPED and other groups of students in MCAS.

Dr. Austin will add those suggestions to the presentation.

George Danis asked what if we have too few additional people? Advised we make sure we are asking for enough, so we don't come back next year and have to say we fell short. Asked for data in layman's terms. If we go forward with an override, we need to convince 2/3 people of the town that the override is necessary that the spending is appropriate.

Eryn Kelley explained the budget like a Venn Diagram: COVID recovery/social-emotional/right sizing of budget. She referenced our per pupil spend and student/teacher ratio. She trusts the administrators that when they say they need x they need x. But the community must come together.

Evan Sheehan encouraged the administration to make sure the budget is absolutely complete, so we don't have to come back in following years.

School Committee comments:

Carlos DaSilva thanked ACES and ADCOM. He is grateful that we were finally able to hire a Human Resource Director but reminded us that the Director of Fine Arts and Additional Assistant Principal are not currently in the budget.

Liza O'Reilly reminded us of other items to consider including the \$400,000 of tech in capital which should be moved to the operating budget. She suggested establishing an override committee to look at all of the factors for FY 23/24. Using the Fund Balance and CARES reimbursements for FY 22 will give us time to prepare for an override for 2023/2024. There is a precedent from FY 11 and FY 12, which used fund balance to weather the current situation. Fund balance was considerably lower at that time than now, but ADCOM advised using fund balance for operating funds.

In this budget we have a request for a study to create a plan. The Town Master Plan is to be presented March 8. It includes recommendations regarding economic development and climate change, town operations, and capital projects.

Questions and comments from the public ensued. Questions related to the overall budget process and the ability of the Town to use its Fund Balance to help cover incremental school expenditures.

It was noted that, as the Board of Selectmen had already indicated, all options for dealing with budget challenges were “on the table.”

A number of public commenters stressed, among other things, the need to fund the school’s request given the COVID-related impact socially and academically on students citing experiences with their own children.

ACES will schedule their next meeting after the Feb 22 school committee meeting. The School Committee will discuss potentially voting on the budget on Feb 22.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:54 PM.

Respectfully Submitted by:
David Anderson