

**Board of Selectmen's Meeting
Joint Meeting with School and Finance Committees
March 29, 2012, 7:00 PM
Medway High School Library
88 Summer Street**

Present: Chairman John Foresto, Selectman Andrew Espinosa, Selectman Dennis Crowley, Selectman Glenn Trindade (7:15) and Town Administrator Suzanne Kennedy. Selectman Richard Dunne was absent.

Also Present: School Committee: Jeff DeVolder, Chair; Carol Bernstein, Vice Chair; Diane Borgatti; Cindy Sullivan; Deb Trindade(7:10 PM); Judith Evans, Superintendent, Medway Public Schools; David Verdolino, Finance Director, Medway Public Schools.

Also Present: Finance Committee: Martin Dietrich, Chair; Jeff O'Neill, Vice Chair; Chris Lagan, Clerk; Members: Christine Devine, Kevin Dickie, Tony Pacholec and Jim Sheehan.

At 7:02 PM School Committee Chairman Jeff DeVolder called the meeting to order and called upon Board of Selectmen Chairman John Foresto to lead the gathering in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Documents submitted for this meeting include the following: (1) Medway Public Schools – Chapter 70 Aid Summary, FY2012 vs. 2013, dated March 2, 2012; (2) Handout depicting PowerPoint slide; and (3) List of questions previously submitted by the Board of Selectmen and the Finance Committee.

Superintendent Judy Evans stated she would first do an overview of the FY13 MPS budget as it was presented at the public hearing on March 1, and then address the submitted questions. Utilizing a PowerPoint presentation, Superintendent Evans reviewed a variety of topics including budget priorities FY13, FY13 budget, FY12 budget compared to FY13 budget, funding sources, projected staffing in both elementary and upper grades, associated costs of personnel changes, and summary of proposed expense changes. She encouraged attendees to ask their questions as she went through the slides.

Responding to a question from Mr. Martin Dietrich, Finance Committee Chairman, about the preschool enrollment figures, Ms. Evans stated the enrollment is down a little. She noted that the public schools are mandated to provide preschool for students of preschool age with disabilities. She theorized that the preschool staff will be down one for next year.

Mr. Jeff O'Neill, Finance Committee Vice-Chair, asked if the staff numbers reflected those who would be retiring. She stated that it does, for those they are aware of; there are people of retirement age who, at present, have not indicated they will stop teaching.

Ms. Evans added that salaries are included based on steps and lanes, but as the contracts are still under negotiation, any other increase is unknown at this time.

Referring to the FTE Historical Analysis on page 4 of the Chapter 70 handout, it was noted that few staff members were added system wide, but there was a marked increase in special education staff. Nine (9) years of FTE costs were presented on page 4, while Per Pupil Cost was featured on page 2.

Question 3 submitted by Mr. Jeff O'Neill, Finance Committee, referred to enrollment and class sizes. Ms. Evans directed him to the presentation handout which showed a projected average class size, between 20 and 22 students per classroom for grades 1 through 8. High school class size varies due to scheduling issues. In general, the class sizes are favorable and something they strive to maintain. Ms. Evans emphasized that she did not recommend reducing class sizes further. Mr. DeVolder agreed.

Mr. Charles Myers stated there did not appear to be a provision to consider students who may move into Medway after this report was written. He noted that, years ago, the number of paraprofessionals was significantly decreased, which had a huge impact on the MCAS score thereafter.

Mr. O'Neill stated he was completely fine with what has been proposed thus far. Ms. Evans clarified that the paraprofessionals who are being reduced are the "one on one" staff. These are the people who work with a single student, and if that student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) changes, i.e., is mainstreamed or other adjustment, that paraprofessional is no longer needed for that student. Regarding students who move into the community, if enrollment causes first grade to be larger than anticipated, they will add a section and made a reduction somewhere else. Ms. Deb Trindade added that those paraprofessionals were predominantly in kindergarten classes.

Ms. Christine Devine asked how optimal class size is determined. Ms. Evans responded that there is not a lot of significant research that says low class size has an impact on students. In fact, it is more likely the combination of experienced teachers, a proven curriculum, and instructional strategies that is more important. Class sizes of 20 can be handled by a teacher and a paraprofessional who each work with 4 students who need more assistance, while the other students move from station to station on their own. Ms. Evans cautioned that sometimes the impact is not seen until three or four years later. Selectman Trindade suggested that the MCAS does not assess how articulate a student may be. A large class size means less discussion, as well as fewer papers because the teacher doesn't have time to grade them.

At this time, Mr. David Verdolino reviewed the Chapter 70 handout, going through it line by line and explaining definitions as he went. He noted that the foundation budget is what the Town is legally required to provide for an education – derived in equal amounts from property values (taxes), and income (higher than property).

Selectman Crowley expressed concern that, given declining enrollment, the Chapter 70 money would be level funded moving forward. It was noted that, for a few years, the funds have been a little more than what was budgeted and that this is an easy pattern to fall into. There could be a year when the seemingly level amount of funding may not materialize, which could upset the budget considerably. Selectman Espinosa suggested developing some strategies now before that kind of scenario happens. Mr. Verdolino responded that the schools are at a good place now, noting that, with the addition of the curriculum director and technology assistant, Medway Public Schools can provide a good education even if funding should be difficult.

Mr. Martin Dietrich asked how the foundation budget is calculated. Mr. Verdolino responded that the state determines it for each community and is typically 41% of a budget.

Referring to Question #1 of the Finance Committee questions, Mr. Verdolino stated health insurance costs are a town-wide cost. It has always been done this way as the Town administers the health care plan. If the schools were required to do so, they would include it in their budget. Mr. O'Neill commented that it is a budget policy in the Lexington model.

Referring to page 3 of the Chapter 70 handout, it was noted that the circuit breaker money received this year has to be spent before the end of next year. If the School Dept. can save it until next year, they will then know what monies to include in the budget, and will have money available if there is a move-in student with special needs. The department did not spend any of the FY12 circuit breaker money so it was carried forward in the budget. It was clarified that circuit breaker money can only be spent for special education costs including transportation. Responding to Selectman Trindade's question on how a smaller amount would be handled, Mr. Verdolino stated there would simply be less spent on special education. He added that, before the recession, reimbursement was legally set at 75% but this year it was funded at a 65%. He stated that page 22 of the proposed FY13 budget showed all the funds and their balances.

Mr. Martin Dietrich asked about school choice funds. Mr. Verdolino stated there was a balance of \$700,000 at the end of this year. Those funds can be used for just about anything that benefits school choice students.

Brief discussion followed on reserve funds. Mr. Dietrich suggested there should be a plan on what to use that for, as well as a contingency plan if other funds are unavailable. In five years all these committees will be different people who may not know what has come before nor know of pitfalls previous groups encountered. Ms. Evans clarified that requests to be paid from school choice funds are reviewed by the School Committee, not just the Superintendent and Finance Director. Mr. Dietrich reiterated that a plan for all funds should be documented and memorialized for those who will need to know about it in the future.

Ms. Suzanne Kennedy stated such a program is in place, noting the Board of Selectmen has a financial reserves policy which was lauded by the outside auditors as one of the best they have seen. She noted that the Town's reserves are in the range recommended by the Department of Revenue.

Brief discussion followed on proposed Capital Improvement Stabilization Fund, operational reserves, revenue sources, and the opportunity for adding programs in foreign language, more health education and other things which can be considered if other programs come in under budget. It was noted that school choice funds should not be used to recurring expenses so that it does not get spent down.

Mr. Charlie Myers suggested making a change out of the way special education is being handled. A number of special education positions were eliminated and replaced with staff related positions. He wondered if the School Dept. was setting itself up for needing additional staff next year because the new positions do not service students. Ms. Evans responded that the staff members servicing students are staff members in the speech and language department, reading specialists, psychologists, counselors or similar area. The directors also have a lot of experience in coordinating and overseeing programs.

Selectman Trindade commented that Town Meeting duration has dramatically decreased the past couple of years due to increased explanations and understanding of financial scenarios. Mr. Martin

Dietrich, Finance Committee, added that the level of transparency has increased in the past three years which has greatly helped residents understand financial situations and implications.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:37.

Respectfully submitted,
Jeanette Galliardt
Night Board Secretary