

Southern Berkshire Regional School District  
Finance Sub-committee meeting  
Sheffield, MA  
February 27, 2017

**Members in attendance:** Art Batacchi, Jr, Marcella Bush, Fran Lartigue, Dennis Sears. Absent: Charlie Flynn

**Others in attendance:** David Hastings, Christine Regan

\* Identifies a motion.

Dennis Sears called the meeting to order at 6pm.

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\*Fran Lartigue made a motion to approve the minutes from the February 2, 2017 meeting, the motion was seconded by Art Batacchi, all in favor.

Dennis Sears opened the floor for audience members to speak.

It was brought up by Alford Board of Selectmen Charlie Ketchen that Sheffield and New Marlboro are financially strapped and that the budget must be tightened. He suggested that the Egremont School should be closed, that the 6<sup>th</sup> grade should be moved to the high school wing and that 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade should be combined. He stated that he sees a trend in people not being able to afford their taxes. He stated that he is concerned about where we are going because of small growth and loss of students.

Fran Lartigue stated that a strong school brings people to the area. She stated that there is a wide variety of people in New Marlboro, from poverty to wealthy. She asked Mr. Ketchen what cost savings he was looking for. His reply was that he thought that staff positions should be cut.

Discussion continued about budget cuts and dismantling the small schools.

There was then discussion/questions on specifics of the budget, such as bond issues. Christine Regan addressed these questions.

Mr. Sears then directed the discussion on recommendations for possible solutions to reducing the FY18 budget.

Ms. Lartigue asked about making reductions across all schools rather than just focusing on the elementary education and the small schools. She asked about what reductions were being made to the middle and high school. David Hastings stated that he did not want to talk about specifics.

\*Ms Lartigue made a motion to direct Mr. Hastings to speak with Mr. Devoti to discuss reductions in the middle and high school. Marcella Bush seconded the motion. All in favor.

Mr. Hastings stated that they have made a 2.3% reduction in the middle and high school.

Mr. Sears asked about the assessment increases.

Ms. Lartigue stated that moving the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade from New Marlboro to the main campus would not reduce the staff because this is the biggest class. She also stated that closing the Egremont School would cause a great loss of support from the Town of Egremont.

Mr. Sears asked Ms. Regan what the number of students was in the Egremont School. Ms. Regan stated that there are 15 students: 8 from in the district and 7 choice children.

Mr. Sears stated that the teacher at the Egremont School is retiring and he expects enrollment to go down. Ms. Lartigue stated that kindergarten registration happens this week, which will give a better idea of what enrollment will be. Mr. Sears stated that he is uncomfortable with the current enrollment numbers at the Egremont School.

\*Mr. Sears made a motion to explore what the cost savings would be to close the Egremont School. Ms. Lartigue seconded the motion. The motion was not unanimous – Marcella Bush was not in favor.

Ms. Lartigue asked Mr. Hastings to look into where the children go after they leave the Egremont School. He stated many go to Muddy Brook. She also asked what the retention was from New Marlboro to Undermountain for the last 10 years.

Discussion continued on closing the Egremont School or suspending the program for FY18.

Mr. Sears asked what the savings would be by moving the 6<sup>th</sup> grade to the middle school. Mr. Hastings said that they would then likely cut 2 teachers. Conversation continued on this topic. Ms. Lartigue asked what this cost savings would be. Christine Regan stated that it would be approximately \$100,000 (\$45,000 salary per teacher plus benefits).

Discussion continued regarding Union negotiations and lay offs.

\*Ms. Lartigue made a motion to direct the superintendent to explore negotiations to possibly move the 6<sup>th</sup> grade to the middle school in time to affect the FY18 school budget. Ms. Bush seconded. All in favor.

Mr. Sears asked Mr. Hastings if it is possible to get by without the assistant elementary school principal.

Mr. Hastings responded that this position is a powerful source. He believes that losing it would cut down on the effectiveness of the principal and would make it difficult.

Ms. Lartigue asked if there are other administrators who could be cut.

Ms. Regan stated that the DESE only recognizes administrators as those who work in Central Office.

Art Batacchi discussed sub budgets and that we can no longer afford for teacher training during the day which requires getting substitutes. He stated that there could be a \$30,000 reduction if we reduce/cut substitute teachers. He stated that there should be no professional development during the day.

Discussion continued on this topic as well as on stipend cuts.

Discussion continued on the need to make serious cuts and wanting to save the small school. Kerry Burk's position as Curriculum Coordinator was discussed as being eliminated because of the \$100,000 salary.

Mr. Hastings stressed the importance of this position.

Ms. Lartigue stated that the responsibilities of this position need to be examined as well as how the work would be redistributed to other staff members.

\*Mr. Sears made a motion to look into eliminating the position of Curriculum Coordinator for next year and redistributing her tasks. Ms. Lartigue seconded the motion. All in favor.

Mr. Sears stated that the goal is to ideally cut the FY18 budget by \$382,000.

Ms. Lartigue stated that there is an excess of paper used and asked if there could be lap top access to look at agendas and such, in order to cut down on paper consumption.

## Corrected page 4 from February 27, 2017 Finance Committee Minutes

*(In the original minutes, the underlined and bolded figure below of \$380,000 was incorrectly typed as \$300,000. Please replace this page to show the corrected figure of #380,000. )*

\* Ms. Lartigue made a motion and asked the superintendent to be paperless when able. Mr. Batacchi seconded the motion. All in favor.

Mr. Sears questioned how we can continue to offer quality education with a decreasing population. Sharing services was discussed at length. Sharing classes via skype was discussed.

\*Ms. Lartigue made a motion to discuss with the full school committee the possibility of having shared services for classes with low enrollment and AP classes via attendance or in an on-line learning environment. Mr. Batacchi seconded the motion. All in favor.

Ms. Lartigue asked Ms. Regan about the cost of paras. Discussion on this continued. Ms. Regan explained what sources of funding there are for paras such as grants and circuit breaker. Conversation continued on budget cuts.

\*Mr. Sears made a motion to ask what the cost savings and feasibility would be to move 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade from the New Marlboro School to the Undermountain School. Mr. Batacchi seconded. Ms. Bush and Ms. Lartigue were not in favor.

Discussion on the advantages of the New Marlboro School continued including the after school activities that happen at the main campus and shuttling children back and forth between buildings. Ms. Lartigue brought up the fact that people will flee the district if the small outlying schools are closed.

Ms. Regan asked if there are any areas that we don't want her to touch in terms of suggested cuts, such as class trips. Mr. Batacchi stated all areas have to be looked at. Ms. Sears said that he wants to cut the budget by \$380,000. Ms. Lartigue recommended doing such cuts in stages.

Discussion ensued on the summer programs that are available to all students.

\*Ms. Lartigue made a motion to direct the superintendent to examine the business office and suggest possible cuts and their dollar value and to include the impact he feels each cut would have on the district. She asked him to examine making cuts ranging from \$275,000 to **\$380,000**. Mr. Batacchi seconded the motion. All in favor.

\*At 7:50pm, Mr. Batacchi moved to adjourn, Ms. Lartigue seconded the motion. All in favor.

Minutes taken by Marcella Bush