

Southern Berkshire Regional School District
Finance Sub-committee meeting
Sheffield, MA
December 6, 2016

Members in attendance: Art Batacchi, Jr, Marcella Bush, Charles Flynn, David Hastings, Christine Regan, Dennis Sears

Fran Lartigue arrived at 5:27pm

Presentations given by: Sandi Hubbard (Student Services), Mary Turo (Elementary School) Kerry Burke (Professional Development),

Others in attendance: Robert Law, Mark Carson

Dennis Sears called the meeting to order at 5:04pm.

Presentation of FY18 Departmental Budgets

Christine Regan began the meeting by giving each member spreadsheets for the presenting department budgets:

1. Student Services, presented by Sandi Hubbard
2. Elementary School, presented by Mary Turo
3. Professional Development, presented by Kerry Burke

1) Student Services -- Sandi Hubbard

Sandi Hubbard first stated that she worked closely with Christine Regan to be clear on how the departmental dollars are utilized. Ms. Hubbard went over changes in the FY 18 Student Services Budget. She discussed grants and entitlements. She explained that figures are based on need or predictions.

Ms. Regan explained grants, specifically a \$240,00 grant for special education students. She also explained that some salaries are distributed out of school choice money.

Dennis Sears asked by salaries are greyed out, stating that it makes it difficult to see true costs. Ms. Regan responded that she has it divided it up but will put actual salaries in.

Ms. Regan explained transportation cost for special service child. One child from last is back on campus this year however there is another special services child who needs transportation this year.

Ms. Regan also explained the Circuit Breaker and how it works and how things are broken out.

Mr. Sears asked about the school physician and her writing of prescriptions. Ms. Hubbard explained that school physician Dr. Sylvia Lisa writes them for the school.

Charlie Flynn asked about the proposed budge for next year and about NAEYC accreditation. Ms. Hubbard said it comes up every 6 years.

Ms. Regan explained the specifics of “Out of District Placement” on page 5 of the presentation. She also explained “School Choice Date – FY17” on page 6, stating that we receive reimbursement for school choice special needs children.

Ms. Hubbard explained a “shared services program.” Berkshire Hills has 3 special needs students whose needs they can not meet – they do not have programs in place specific to the needs of these students. Because we do have such programs in place and can meet the needs of these students, they come to us. Berkshire Hills provides transportation for these children.

Mr. Sears asked why these students don’t “school choice in” to which Ms. Hubbard explained that students cannot school choice in to individualized programs.

2. Elementary School – Mary Turo

Mary Turo went through the presentation page by page going over only the changes. She stated that there is a decline in enrollment therefore a decline in need is reflected in the numbers. Ms. Turo specifically went over the “Social/Emotional Learning Program” on page 2 of her presentation. She stated that the state requires that this program be offered.

Fran Lartigue asked about the specifics of this program – the quality of the program and “what makes it work.” Mr. Turo explained that it is an instruction based program and that teachers have noticed progress. Kerry Burke states that this program is a “proactive response for common language” explaining that it is a soft assessment program and went over the steps of the program. Ms. Lartigue explained that we track the discipline referrals and Ms. Turo said that they do. Ms. Turo said that the “Social/emotional Learning Program” was not a line item budget last years.

Mr. Sears asked about the salary lines – specifically the assistant principal line on top of page 2 of the document. Ms. Regan explained that the accountability line is the assistant principal salary.

Ms. Turo continued going over the chart by specific grade break outs.

Ms. Lartigue asked when we find out about teacher retirement.

Mr. Flynn asked about a rumor regarding the Egremont teacher retiring and if this position will be posted. Dave Hastings confirmed that it will be.

An in depth conversation ensued regarding the change from the 6th Grade class going to Natures Classroom to instead going to the United Nations in New York City (page 4 of the presentation). Ms Turo said that the teachers feel that an UN trip works better with the social studies curriculum than with the Natures Classroom trip works with the science curriculum. She also stressed the difficulty in staffing this five day trip properly. There was great displeasure by the Finance Committee by this change. Fran Lartigue, Charlie Fynn, Art Batacchi & Dennis Sears all spoke of the importance of Nature’s Classroom and their strong support of keeping it in place.

Ms. Lartigue discussed the students looking forward to this program, the tradition of it and “the

right of passage” that it is for 6th graders. She asked what would be lost from the science curriculum by not going. She also stated that Natures Classroom is more than a science trip and there is a greater level of ‘life learning” in this program.

Ms. Turo stated that they are looking to meet new science standards.

Mr. Flynn stated his displeasure with stopping this program and stressed its importance and value. He asked if this has been thoroughly thought out and also asked if parents and the community have been consulted about dropping this program.

Ms. Turo stated it has been thought out and stressed that staffing it is difficult and that it required 5 full days out of school. There is a 6:1 student/teacher ration needed for this trip.

Ms. Lartigue and Mr. Flynn stressed that they are invaluable days of unique learning however.

Ms. Lartigue asked about the possibility of doing both trips (UN & Nature’s Classroom).

Mr. Flynn asked about the 6th grade social studies curriculum and how it would fit in with a UN trip stating “there is not as much learning from a UN trip.”

Ms. Turo explained the “around the world, continent to continent” curriculum.

Ms. Lartigue would like to see a concrete plan that will supplement Nature’s Classroom.

Ms. Turo will explore this more with the teachers and there will be a follow up meeting to discuss this further.

Mr. Flynn suggested that this be taken up with the entire school board.

Note: The Nature’s Classroom trip is planned for this year. The change would be for next year.

Ms. Turo continued to go over page 4 of the document.

Ms. Lartigue asked about Empowering Writers on page 4. Ms. Turo explained the program

Ms. Lartigue expressed her displeasure with the GoMath Program and wondered if we are seeing an increase in student ability based on this program. Kerry Burke stated that progress is seen 3-5 years in. The program offers teachers the opportunity to reach out to other schools to share teaching approaches

Ms. Turo continued going over pages 6&7.

Ms. Regan went over the funding of field trips (page 6) stating that the district funds half of the cost. The other half is covered by the PTA, fund raisers, etc.

Mr. Sears asked why we don’t take trips to Albany. “It is so close and there and there’s a wealth of offerings there.” Ms. Turo stated that trips are curriculum driven specifically citing Plymouth Plantation and the Freedom Trail.

Mr. Sears and Mr. Flynn suggested closer historical trips such as the Mohawk Valley, Historic Deerfield, the Schenectady Museum.

Ms. Lartigue asked about the certification of a Spanish teacher. Ms. Turo stated that she has not found one.

Conversation ensued regarding the success of the student production of the “Jungle Book.”

3. Professional Development – Kerry Burke

Ms. Burke went over the changes in the budget stated that grant funding does support programs but this is not reflected in the budget.

She specifically went over restraint training and the change in mandates (page 2 of her presentation). She wants to make sure that there is time for training. In the past training has been done during the school day. Ms. Burke wants to be sure that there is also time beyond the school day for this training should it be needed.

Ms. Lartigue asked how professional development expenses are assessed and if teachers are asked what they have learned and to share what they have learned.

Ms. Burke confirmed this.

Mr. Flynn asked if there is a “train the trainer model.”

Ms. Burke explained that there is small group learning first.

Conversation ensued between Ms. Hubbard, Ms. Turo, Ms. Burke and Ms. Lartigue on the value of professional development, how it is implemented, how gained knowledge is shared with the rest of the faculty, and what are the gauges for the value of this learning.

Mr. Sears asked about the low increase of District Grants on page 2 of the presentation.

Ms. Regan stated that it is because we need to wait until grant money is approved and then expenditures will show an increase.

Ms. Burke stated that there are 11 new mentor teachers and 6 second year teachers.

Ms. Burke completed her presentation.

Question from the public:

Mark Carson, Finance Committee from New Marlboro

Asked about a program that Mike Farmer did bringing students from other countries here and asked why it does not happen anymore.

Dave Hastings started that it continues though through a different venue.

Art Batacchi made a motion to adjourn at 6:45 pm, it was seconded by Ms. Lartigue, all in favor.

Minutes taken by Marcella Bush