Jennifer Patterson chaired the meeting. Nathan Fennessy was appointed to the Committee for this meeting in the absence of one member. The meeting was called to order at 5:32 p.m.

The meeting was a discussion of next steps regarding early childhood education programming. Ms. Patterson noted that by the end of the meeting, the Committee could make a recommendation for consideration by the full Board at its next meeting on November 7. There has been time to hear from the public, including from the Early Childhood Steering Committee, from individuals providing testimony at meetings, and through emails. The administration has, at the Committee’s request, presented several programming options for consideration. Ms. Patterson stated that the meeting’s primary purpose was to provide time for Instructional Committee members to talk about what they have heard, to hear answers from the administration to questions that have been posed by members, and to express their ideas, not to hear from the public. Ms. Patterson indicated that she had visited Mill Brook School a few weeks ago because she had questions and concerns, and she would like time to share her observations. She noted that there will be additional opportunities for public comment going forward, but indicated that if there are those in attendance who feel they need to speak, there may be time later in the meeting for this.

Superintendent Forsten made a brief presentation of the work completed thus far. She summarized the work of the Early Childhood Steering Committee, whose 21 members met nine times last school year.

Superintendent Forsten presented information about the make-up of Concord’s kindergarten and first-grade classes. 11% of kindergarteners (9% of 1st graders) are English Learners; 31% of kindergarteners (42% of 1st graders) qualify for free or reduced-cost lunch; 13% of kindergarteners (10% of 1st graders) are identified with a disability; and 28% of kindergarteners (26% of 1st graders) receive Title I remedial services. Actual percentages vary across the schools. Mill Brook School (MBS), a K-2
primary school, has double the number of students in kindergarten and first grade as the other three schools with these grades. MBS has a larger percentage of English Learners in these grades compared to the other schools.

Committee members asked for clarification of the logistics and function of Family Resource Centers currently operating in the District, funded by the SAMHSA grant. There are four centers at MBS and Beaver Meadow Schools (BMS), the Housing Authority apartments on Jennings Drive, and the Heights Parks and Recreation Center (the former Dame School). A fifth center is being considered, perhaps in the Rumford School neighborhood. Each center runs one morning per week and is open to families with children from birth through five. There are activities for the children and opportunities for connections with and among parents/guardians and various professionals from the District and partnering community agencies, including Ascentria, Child and Family Services, Early Supports and Services/Community Bridges, and others. Some families attend one neighborhood center; others attend more than one. School screenings are administered to children who attend.

Superintendent Forsten presented information about space availability in the elementary schools that include kindergarten. It appears that there is room at each school to offer full-day kindergarten and, based on enrollment projections at this time, still have space for Developmental Preschool classes at BMS and MBS, as well as the Crimson Tide (CRTC) preschool at Abbot-Downing School (ADS). In some schools, some of the spaces that would be taken up by kindergarten and preschool have been used for Title I, special education and other programs.

Tom Croteau asked for clarification on the need for additional classrooms in the schools. Superintendent Forsten explained that two part-day sections of kindergarten share one classroom—one section in the morning and one in the afternoon. With full-day kindergarten, each section would use one classroom all day. In response to a question from Mr. Croteau whether the plan could accommodate students who might enroll in public kindergarten who previously had attended a private kindergarten, Superintendent Forsten indicated that it did.

Superintendent Forsten and Donna Palley discussed the possibility that additional preschool options may emerge if some District and community resources currently used to support extended programming for kindergarten students were instead used for preschoolers. For example, the District uses Title I funds to extend the day for selected kindergarten students. If a full day of programming was offered to all kindergarten students, these funds might be applied to programming for preschoolers. There may be community options as well, with centers that offer low-cost options. This is an area that could be explored, with grant funding sought with partners.

Superintendent Forsten and Ms. Palley discussed the history of the Developmental Preschool in Concord in the last several years. The program has been situated in several schools over time, including Conant, Rumford, Eastman, Dame, MBS and BMS; most recently, the program has been located at BMS and MBS. Ms. Patterson noted that the number of tuition students at BMS has not been as large or proportional to the
students with disabilities as it has been at MBS. Ms. Palley pointed out that MBS serves a population that is double the size of BMS. Ms. Patterson noted that the goal of elementary school consolidation was to have inclusive neighborhood schools, with students attending their neighborhood school, and few staff moving between buildings. Ms. Palley explained that the District has not offered the Developmental Preschool in every neighborhood in Concord. The District does place some preschoolers in one of five other centers, including NHTI, Woodside School, Crimson Tide, Emerson and Head Start. The program staff look at their student numbers and make decisions based on neighborhood and student needs.

The District’s Transportation Department estimated that it would cost about $18,500 per year to transport six to eight preschoolers to Head Start for families that do not have transportation available. This cost is based on students living in the Heights neighborhood, which is where the Head Start center is located.

Superintendent Forsten presented a proposal about how teacher preparation time (45 minutes per day) might be supported in the buildings if kindergarten full-day. Three part-time (5.75 hours per day) itinerant teachers in each of the four schools each day would work with students on activities involving academics, social development, STEM and creative play. The cost would be approximately $180,000. These teachers would receive benefits on a pro-rated basis. Ms. Patterson noted that this is different from the more inclusive, consolidated approach, where staff do not need to travel. It was noted that this model is similar to the current Project SEE, where traveling staff provide science lessons to students in grades 1-5 while teachers meet in collaborative groups. Alana asked that STEAM be considered rather than STEM. (The ‘A’ stands for Arts.) Superintendent Forsten indicated that this was a good idea.

Superintendent Forsten reviewed each of the five options for early childhood programming that had been previously presented, and suggested a timeline for moving forward on the issue:

- November 2: Create a recommendation for the Board to consider
- November 7: Full Board considers recommendation
- January-March: Development of FY 2018 budget with early childhood component

Rusty Cofrin wondered what the total costs would be. It was noted that the meeting would focus on educational programming rather than costs.

Ms. Patterson indicated that she hoped the Committee would make a recommendation to the Board at this meeting. She noted that she does not believe a final decision on the topic could be made at this time without considering the cost of the program in the context of the full budget, and understanding what the impact would be on existing programs. With all the other cost issues that have been discussed, including the conversation from steam to natural gas heating in four schools with the closing of Concord Steam, she said she does not believe there is a way to separate this discussion from other cost factors, which is why she suggested that the final decision come through the budget process.
Alana Kimball wondered about moving forward with the partial full-day program option, where each school would have one or two full-day classrooms along with other half-day classes. She suggested that this could be a one-year pilot. She suggested that the full-day classes be demographically representative of the school population so that the classrooms would be balanced.

Mr. Fennessy disagreed with Ms. Patterson for two reasons. He said he has spoken to community providers, who have asked for time to prepare for changes in the District’s programming. If the Board waited until March or April to make a decision, this would make it difficult for these organizations to plan for the next year. He said he wanted the Board to make a decision as soon as possible for this reason. Also, he noted that teachers will need time to develop a new program.

Clint Cogswell noted that he feels the Committee has had a thorough process and is convinced that full-day kindergarten is best for students. He noted that the District already offer many preschool opportunities and that many entering kindergartners have participated in these options. However, he said he does not believe that the Board can vote for full-day kindergarten without considering its costs, and suggested that the administration should be asked to develop a budget that stays within certain tax increase limits. Then, when the budget is under consideration, there may need to be cuts to make it work. He said he does not believe that full-day kindergarten should go into the budget no matter the costs; as he would not want to cut good programs in order to make full-day kindergarten. He said he is comfortable asking the administration to prepare the budget and noted that by the end of January or beginning of February the Board can have a good sense of what the budget is going to be.

Mr. Fennessy reiterated that he would like to see the Board take a vote on full-day kindergarten next week. This could still be discussed during the budget process, but he believes a decision could be made before budget time. Ms. Patterson expressed concern about what the trade-offs might be and said she does not want to make the decision in a vacuum. Perhaps the Board could work on the budget on the earlier side of the time frame. She noted that this issue should be looked at in the context of the full budget.

Several Committee members noted that there may be the potential for more state money in the future, as both gubernatorial candidates support paying districts the full adequacy amount for kindergarten students.

Mr. Fennessy noted that the previous Board President advised that this decision not be made within the budget process; that it is an instructional decision. He said he believes a decision should be made sooner than later, and can be revisited during the budget process.

Mr. Cogswell wondered about charging a modest tuition for kindergarten programming. He was speaking with a parent in the community who felt that this would be a welcome option, given the high cost of childcare and preschool programs.
Ms. Patterson wondered about a transition program or pilot, starting with a combination of part-and full-day kindergarten, with five full-day classrooms across the District. The make-up of the class would be geared toward students who need this the most. A lottery or payment process could be used for the remaining slots. This could be done for one year, and move forward from there, with perhaps some additional state funds in the future.

Maureen Redmond-Scura said she had visited Abbot-Downing School’s kindergarten and observed students who she feels would benefit from a longer-day program. She suggested piloting a full-day program for those in need. This option would support the research that shows good outcomes for students who are at risk. She also suggested that the Board consider offering space in the schools for private providers to offer before-half-day kindergarten care, so that children who have difficulty with transitions can stay in the same location all day. Ms. Kimball noted that she agreed with the idea of a pilot that offered one or two heterogeneous full-day classes in each building.

Mr. Richards expressed concern with the idea of forming heterogeneous classes, as this would leave out a large number of students who would benefit from or want to attend full-day kindergarten. He expressed concern that, over the years, some children in a family might attend full-day, but others would not be selected so would attend a part-day program. He said there might be community concern with a lottery system.

Mr. Cogswell responded that this pilot would only be for one year. Ms. Kimball noted that, in the case of twins, both could be assured a spot if one was selected. Ms. Patterson noted the complexity of managing this level of detail for the administration. Mr. Fennessy expressed concerns about first-grade teachers receiving some students who had attended full-day and some who had only received part-day kindergarten, and wondered how the first-grade teacher would handle this situation. Ms. Palley noted that two of the newer elementary principals previously worked in districts where both full- and part-day programs were offered, and found that it was not a concern for first-grade teachers, as there is generally a range of learners in any classroom. Mr. Croteau noted that having a full-day option would help struggling students get closer to first-grade levels. Mr. Fennessy noted that many struggling students would not receive a full-day program if the number of classrooms was limited to one or two per school.

Mr. Fennessy indicated that he thinks a universal full-day program without lotteries or collecting money makes the most sense from an educational perspective. Mr. Cogswell agreed that a full-day program is the most educationally sound. Ms. Patterson indicated that she would like a full-day program for all students. She was concerned that charging tuition, offering the program only to selected students, or having a lottery approach would administrative complexity as well as philosophical challenges to the situation. She said her only reservation involves making this decision outside the context of the full budget. She shared another idea: providing full-day kindergarten as a pilot in only one school, perhaps BMS, as it has the most space available. This could be considered a step to bringing the program to all schools.
Mr. Fennessy wondered if the Board could commit to a pilot if nothing else, and then consider more during the budget process.

Ms. Redmond-Scura noted that she was aware of research that found that for students with ADD, full-day kindergarten is not the best option and can be harmful if the program begins to look like first grade. She said she knows that adding full-day kindergarten means paying more money for students to be playing, which is what is developmentally appropriate.

Mr. Fennessy noted that he has visited Concord kindergarten classrooms and does not think that they look like first-grade classrooms.

Ms. Patterson wondered how a pilot would be judged; what data would be used. Mr. Cogswell responded that studies about the effectiveness of kindergarten programs extend over many years. Doing a pilot for a short time does not make sense to him.

Jim Richards noted that when the budget is being developed, anything that is not contractually required is under consideration. He would be recommending cutting programs if this was needed. He indicated that the budget includes everything, including music, art and physical education.

Ms. Patterson wondered whether a pilot or interim step toward full-day kindergarten could be an additional option that the Board would talk about during the budget review. Mr. Fennessy agreed that a pilot program would at least begin implementing what the Board would want to do in the future. He noted that it might be contentious to select one school, but at least the District could start the process of developing a program that could then be implemented across the District. He indicated that he thought programs in the District for four-year-olds would be great, but not right now, as there are many good programs available; this could be a future aspiration.

Mr. Croteau commented that there may be some merit in reconsidering the timing of full-day kindergarten, given what else is going on in the District. He indicated that perhaps it would make sense to continue with half-day kindergarten and also offer a four-year-old preschool program instead of piloting the full-day program.

Ms. Patterson asked if there were any members of the public who wanted to make comments. Two members of the public provided testimony to the Board.

Maria Lucia Petagna, a Concord resident and a single parent with two children, one in second grade at Christa McAuliffe School (CMS) and a preschooler who attends day care and Emerson Preschool, spoke about priorities and budgets. She said her top priority was her children, and urged the Board to also make Concord children’s education its top priority. She said she considered it unethical for children to be put on the back burner in favor of other expenses. She urged the Board to move forward with full-day kindergarten.

Betty Hoadley, Concord taxpayer, was concerned that the Committee was hurrying the process with regard to early childhood program decisions. She indicated that she wanted the Committee and the Board to take their time and make sure that the public
has had an opportunity to participate and express opinions. She reminded the Committee that Concord has the only autonomous School Board in New Hampshire and must be very careful as it deliberates. She said she believed there are individuals in the community who do not know about the early childhood discussions and so have not weighed in with their perspectives. While Ms. Hoadley would appreciate all students having full-day kindergarten, she said believes that preschool is the wave of the future, and if the Board was looking to enhance programming, it should involve preschool.

Ms. Patterson made a motion that the Instructional Committee recommend to the full Board that the Board instruct the administration to prepare, as part of the FY18 budget, a proposal that includes full-day kindergarten for all students in the District, and in addition, prepare one or more proposals that the administration feels would be feasible interim steps if it is not feasible to fund full-day kindergarten in the coming year. This motion was not seconded.

Mr. Cogswell noted that he believed it is important to prepare a budget with full-day kindergarten in it, and also ask the administration to keep the budget within a certain rate increase. If it turns out to be too expensive within the context of the whole budget, Mr. Cogswell noted that the budget can be changed. He noted that this was why there is a three-month-long budget process; the administration is often asked to go back and make revisions.

Mr. Fennessy indicated that he would like to modify the motion to include only the first part regarding the recommendation for a budget line for full-day kindergarten. He wondered whether there should be a number also attached to the motion. Ms. Patterson responded that she did not believe there should be a number involved, as the Instructional Committee should focus on consideration of the program rather than its financial aspect. She wondered what the priorities of the Committee would be if full-day programming was not feasible for next year.

Ms. Redmond-Scura noted that there is already a good idea about what full-day kindergarten would cost – approximately $1.2 million. She said she already has a sense that this is a problem, given other cost items that have been brought to the Board’s attention. She noted that she does not want to just assume that full-day kindergarten can be implemented with everything else that is on the table budget-wise.

Ms. Patterson explained that the reason for the second part of her motion was to have the Board be able to consider an option short of the full-day program if this was needed for cost reasons. Ms. Patterson indicated that she is heartened to know that if there was a change to full-day kindergarten, there would still be room for preschool classrooms at MBS and ADS, that planning periods could be covered, and that it wouldn’t negatively impact the specialist schedules. She would like to see the full-day program fully described in the budget process, and would like to see other options also fully described. She suggested the Committee give the administration guidance now about these other options.
Mr. Fennessy indicated that the first part of Ms. Patterson’s motion made sense to him, and suggested that the Committee continue to work with the administration on the next best option, as he is not sure there is consensus about what that is at this point.

Mr. Cogswell and Ms. Kimball agreed that the Committee should respond to the first part of the motion as Plan A, and then work on Plan B.

Mr. Fennessy made a motion that the Instructional Committee recommend that the Board instruct the administration to prepare a budget for a full-day kindergarten program as part of the 2017-2018 budget. He recommended that the Instructional Committee work on a proposal that is short of full-day kindergarten that might be implemented in the event that it was not feasible from a budget perspective to implement full-day kindergarten in 2017-2018. This motion was not seconded.

Ms. Patterson indicated that it might be simpler to do the first part of the motion, and the second part may not need to be in the motion. She noted that it should be clear that this is all subject to the budget process. Ms. Kimball indicated that this should happen as early as possible.

Ms. Redmond-Scura noted that some people in the community feel the Board is dragging their feet on this issue, while others have indicated that they feel the Board is rushing. She would propose that a proposal for full-day kindergarten be included in the 2017-2018 budget for consideration by the Board during its budget process.

The Instructional Committee voted 4-0 to recommend to the full Board that the Board instruct the administration to include full-day kindergarten programming as part of the 2017-2018 budget proposal (motioned by Ms. Redmond-Scura, seconded by Ms. Patterson).

Ms. Patterson noted that perhaps another motion was not needed in addition to this one. The Instructional Committee could continue to work on this issue, and develop another option for programming.

Ms. Patterson asked the Superintendent what would be helpful in terms of developing a back-up model. Superintendent Forsten suggested that it would be helpful for the administration to have time to consider what has been discussed at this meeting. The administration will come back with options beyond the universal full-day program. From the discussion at this meeting, it seemed that the Committee was not interested in the 6-hour option, and so that will be taken off the table. Superintendent Forsten noted that assessing a pilot may be difficult if there is only four or five months to do this before a budget is developed for the following year.

Committee members requested that another meeting be scheduled for November or December to continue discussing other possible plans for early childhood programming. They would specifically like to look at other options as possible alternatives to full-day kindergarten in case the budget does not support implementing a universal full-day program. The options could include piloting full-day classes at one school, piloting one or two classes of full-day programming at all schools, or offering one of the hybrid programs involving four-year-olds that has been presented.
The Committee voted 4-0 to adjourn (motioned by Mr. Fennessy, seconded by Ms. Redmond-Scura).

The meeting adjourned at 7:49 p.m.

Donna Palley, Recorder