Board of Education, Concord School District

Instructional Committee

Date: June 22, 2016

Committee members present: Alana Kimball, Maureen Redmond-Scura, Jennifer Patterson

Committee member absent: Barb Higgins

Board members present: Rusty Cofrin, Clint Cogswell, Tom Croteau, Nathan Fennessy, Jim Richards

Administrators: Superintendent Terri Forsten, Assistant Superintendent Donna Palley

Additional committee members: Mill Brook School Principal Phil Callanan, Christa McAuliffe School Principal Kris Gallo, Sarah Williams, Kindergarten teacher at Mill Brook School, Danielle Moran, Grade 1 teacher at Christa McAuliffe School, District Special Education Preschool Coordinator Barbara Hemingway, Preschool Coordinator, Safe Schools/Healthy Students Laurie Hart, Laura Milliken, Director of Spark New Hampshire, Mary Stuart Gile, former NHTI Early Childhood Education Professor and legislator, parents Madeleine Mineau, Karen Paddleford and Maria Lucia Petagna

Agenda Item 1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 5:45 p.m. Acting chairperson Jennifer Patterson noted that this would be the first of several meetings to discuss early childhood education in the Concord School District. She noted that the agenda included presentation of the report, Board member questions and input, further comments from committee members, and then questions and input from the public.

Superintendent Forsten listed the members of the subcommittee: educators including Superintendent Terri Forsten, Assistant Superintendent Donna Palley, Mill Brook School Principal Phil Callanan, Christa McAuliffe School Principal Kris Gallo, Stacy Macri, Kindergarten teacher at Abbot-Downing School, Sarah Williams, Kindergarten teacher at Mill Brook School, Barbara O’Brien Lane, Grade 2 teacher at Beaver Meadow School, Danielle Moran, Grade 1 teacher at Christa McAuliffe School, District Special Education Preschool Coordinator Barbara Hemingway; and Preschool Coordinator, Safe Schools/Healthy Students Laurie Hart; early childhood experts Laura Milliken, Director of Spark New Hampshire, Mary Stuart Gile, former NHTI Early Childhood Education Professor and legislator, and Mary Jane Wallner, Director, Merrimack Valley Day Care Center and legislator; parents Lauren Mercier, Madeleine Mineau, Karen Paddleford and Maria Lucia Petagna; and School Board members Nathan Fennessy, Clint Cogswell, Barbara Higgins and Jennifer Patterson.
She noted that the committee was guided in its work by this essential question: What are the best practices in kindergarten programming and how do these practices connect with early childhood programs in our school community?

The committee’s work had three parts (and three subcommittees):


2. Connect with Early Childhood Programs – subcommittee members included Mary Jane Wallner, Jennifer Patterson, Danielle Moran, Madeleine Mineau, Kris Gallo, and Nathan Fennessy.

3. District and Community Impact – subcommittee members included Barbara Hemingway, Clint Cogswell, Lauren Mercier, Sarah Williams, Laura Milliken, and Barbara O’Brien-Lane.

The steering committee used a number of sources for its work, including the National Association for the Education of Young Children, NH Kindergarten readiness indicators, early childhood education in Concord, and the work of its subcommittees: Research, Connections, and Impact. Each of the subcommittees then briefly reported on their work.

**Research on Early Childhood Education subcommittee**

Phil Callanan noted that the work of this subcommittee resulted in realizations that early childhood curriculum must be of high quality and developmentally appropriate; there are immediate positive outcomes for all students in full-day kindergarten; high-quality preschool has a positive impact on early learning; early childhood education is critical for children in poverty, dual language learners, and students with disabilities; the impact of preschool on academic performance fades over time; and an investment in preschool shows long-term impact for students.

In response to a question from Ms. Patterson whether the research and results distinguished between preschool and kindergarten, Mr. Callanan noted that both were included.

Ms. Patterson noted what seemed like conflicting information from the research regarding the fading of academic benefit versus the long-term impact on students.

Superintendent Forsten noted that some research supported the long-term impact of early childhood programming, while other research showed that the impact faded by third grade. The fading impact is largely connected to improvements in academic achievement and is particularly connected to research on the part- versus full-day kindergarten program. Long-term benefits, cognitive, social/emotional and behavioral, have been noted related to children’s multi-year participation with full-time quality preschool programming.
In response to a question from Tom Croteau whether this long-term “fading” was particular to certain subgroups of students or overall, Mr. Callanan replied that the answer depended on which research was being examined. In general, stronger outcomes are noted for vulnerable populations, including children with disabilities, children living in poverty and English learners. Maureen Redmond-Scura noted that some research showed children having been in full-day kindergarten had negative feelings about school going forward. Mr. Callanan noted that a serious pitfall of moving to full-day kindergarten was when kindergarten programming began to look like a first-grade classroom, lacking critical social/emotional development pieces.

Ms. Stuart Gile commented that the long-term studies of early childhood program models, including those developed in Chicago, involved rigorous and well-designed research that identified long-term positive impacts. Those program models have not been emulated. In recent years, individual states have developed their own programs. She also noted that, relative to the fading of early childhood gains, there is also evidence of the “latency effect” – the effects of a high-quality childhood education program are seen later in the child’s life.

Mr. Callanan noted that, in the early childhood education research reviewed by the subcommittee, four key areas must be addressed:

1. Program is developmentally appropriate
2. Program addresses social-emotional development
3. Program promotes positive teacher and student relationships
4. Program provides meaningful opportunities for learning

He noted that, for example, our current morning kindergarten ends at 10:30 a.m., which may not allow for meaningful learning opportunities.

Ms. Redmond-Scura noted that it is important to realize that kindergarten teachers have a higher number of students in total than other classroom teachers. They must plan for and get to know double the number of students.

**Connections with Early Childhood programs subcommittee**

Christa McAuliffe Principal Kris Gallo noted that 170 school districts in New Hampshire serve kindergarteners; more than half offer full-day kindergarten (96 out of 170). The subcommittee sent a survey to principals who are part of a listserv in New Hampshire, and 19 responded. The questions addressed the type of programs offered; whether tuition was charged; what happened for families that could not afford the tuition; whether families could opt out of full-day kindergarten; and how the schools used the additional time in the day.

Thirteen of the 19 responding schools offer full-day kindergarten. There was a very wide variety of responses to the questions.

Five districts charge tuition ($1500-$4500 for a school year); some offer a fee waiver to families; some offer free to Title I-eligible students; some have an application process
for tuition waivers; some offer tuition waivers for those students eligible for the Free and Reduced-Price Lunch program.

One principal noted that he felt it was a disservice to charge tuition because families that need it the most are often those who can afford it the least.

Several schools did not allow opt-outs if full-day kindergarten was available; several allowed families to send their children for half-days.

The extra time in kindergarten was spent on academics; social/emotional components; naps and rest time; art/music/PE/technology.

The New Hampshire School Administrators Association (NHSAA) surveyed 86 districts in 2015. Of these, 58 reported full-day kindergarten for all students; 10 provided for some. The remainder offered a variety of options ranging from part-day kindergarten for all students to full-day kindergarten for all students.

The subcommittee looked at several local districts’ experience with full-day kindergarten. Merrimack Valley’s program began in 2014-2015. Bow’s program began in 2015-2016. Hopkinton began a pilot in 2013-2014 with a total of 16 students, and has now gone to full-day kindergarten for all students. Laconia began its full-day kindergarten program in 2008-2009, which was totally Title I grant-funded.

In terms of teacher planning, Ms. Gallo explained that this subcommittee had wondered that if opt-out is offered, whether separate full-day and half-day kindergarten programs would be needed, and asked what kind of impact this might have on children whose parents opt out of full-day kindergarten if their peers have full-day kindergarten and they have half-day kindergarten.

Mr. Croteau asked whether, considering lunch time, recess time, and perhaps a special, how much of the hoped-for extra time will actually be gained.

Mr. Fennessy noted that children are not getting the full 2.5 hours for academics in the half-day program, with time needed for transitioning, for example, and just by extending the day, more learning opportunities are available.

Ms. Stuart Gile noted that the report references young children being able to engage in complex and complicated play. She said she would hope that would be pursued in Concord’s kindergarten programming and that this kind of learning would be stressed. She said she feels this would have significant implications for teacher development and teacher training.

Ms. Patterson noted that the reference to “academics” makes it sound like the time was spent exclusively on academics, but that academics encompasses more than narrowly-defined reading, writing and mathematics.

Ms. Gallo noted that this subcommittee read the survey responses but did not visit the full-day kindergarten programs in the state.

Mr. Cogswell noted that changes in kindergarten programming over the decades have been dramatic, including moving more academics into the classroom. He said he felt
strongly that, if by adding full-day kindergarten, the district ends up with a program that looks like a first-grade classroom, it will have defeated the purpose.

Mr. Callanan noted that one can see the differences from kindergarten to first grade classrooms simply by observing the furniture in the room. A kindergarten room, for example, must include opportunities for play.

**District and Community Impact subcommittee**

Assistant Superintendent Palley noted that the initial cost to set up full-day kindergarten program in Concord is estimated to be $1.2 million (salaries, supplies, furnishings), with an estimated ongoing annual cost of $1 million. This would translate into an $83 projected tax impact on a home valued at $250,000. These estimates did not include increasing the number of specialists (art, music, PE, etc.). There would be a potential savings in transportation costs of $74,198, although it was noted that most of this would be lost if an additional bus was needed in the early morning or the late afternoon because of the additional students at these times of day.

The impact on families included potential savings on costs associated with preschool, child care, or private kindergarten. Before and after-school care cost were not factored in, as families may need this services at any grade level. She noted that teachers embraced the option of having more time with their students.

She noted that space was a very big consideration in this subcommittee’s work; at this point all four elementary schools that offer kindergarten have sufficient classroom spaces to accommodate full-day kindergarten.

Adding full-day kindergarten at Mill Brook School would likely result in a need to move some or all of the preschool programming there to Beaver Meadow School, which already houses part of the preschool program. A move of the Mill Brook School preschool to Beaver Meadow School would likely result in increased transportation costs for preschoolers, many of whom live in the Mill Brook neighborhood. In addition, it has historically been easier to fill tuition-paying slots at Mill Brook versus Beaver Meadow, so a move could impact tuition revenue. In addition, the Crimson Tide Preschool, affiliated with Concord High’s Regional Technical Center program, is currently housed at Abbot-Downing School. Depending on enrollment at Abbot-Downing, this program could be impacted.

Ms. Palley noted that the subcommittee looked at scheduling options for full-day (to 2:30 p.m.) or nearly full day (to 1:45 p.m.). “Nearly full day” would not require hiring specialists, and the district could encourage its afterschool providers to start their programs at 1:45 p.m.

The subcommittee also considered the impact of preschool program expansion for ELL, Title I, and special education students. Ms. Palley noted that there is good research on the positive effects of quality preschool programming for these student groups. Grant funding, including state entitlements for Title 1 and Special Education, could potentially be used to support preschool programming.
Ms. Palley noted that preschool and child care providers in the community have already begun planning for changes as a result of full-day kindergarten. She noted that several providers did state that there would be significant financial impacts on them if Concord moved to full-day kindergarten.

Ms. Palley noted that the Board could consider redistricting between Mill Brook and Beaver Meadow, to move additional students to Beaver Meadow, especially once the Sewalls Falls bridge work is completed.

In response to a question from Jim Richards about the numbers of preschooolers in each program, Ms. Hemingway noted that there are 90 students at Mill Brook 40 at Beaver Meadow.

Mr. Fennessy noted that kindergarten screening resulted in a determination that 91% of incoming kindergarteners attended child care or preschool programs, and asked whether it would be the district’s expectation that 91% of incoming kindergarten students would need additional care before or after school. Ms. Palley noted that the 173 students who came to the kindergarten screening events might be different from the 150 who did not attend. Ms. Hemingway noted that she is continuing to get a few more survey results.

Mr. Richards asked about the impact on cafeterias or other large-group spaces. It was noted that the subcommittee did not discuss how many lunch periods would need to be added to schools’ schedules.

Ms. Redmond-Scura noted that the estimates did not include specials, but she asked, if the Board decided to extend the kindergarten day to 2:30 p.m., would specialists need to be hired? Teachers are scheduled for daily 45-minute planning periods, per their contract. Depending on the overall student population, additional specialists may be needed, especially at Mill Brook School, for 45-minute daily classes for the students.

Ms. Patterson asked whether savings on transportation would be lost if children left at 1:45 p.m. Additional busses might be needed at that time if parents or private child care providers couldn’t pick up students.

All elementary schools offer after-school child care programs. The Boys and Girls Club run programs at Mill Brook and Broken Ground in partnership with the District’s 21C Program. The Boys and Girls Club also runs a child care program at Christa McAuliffe School. The YMCA runs after-school child care programs at Beaver Meadow and Abbot-Downing Schools, in conjunction with the District’s 21C Program. Kindergarteners can attend after school child care programs at all of the schools except Christa McAuliffe School.

Ms. Stuart Gile noted that the report indicates that space is available “in the short term” to accommodate classes, and asked whether the district was anticipating more students in the future. Superintendent Forsten noted that projections indicate declining enrollment, but that this is hard to predict.
In response to a question from Mr. Richards about the number of the 130 total preschool children who ride the bus, Ms. Hemingway responded that families that pay tuition must transport their children; busing is not available. Students receiving special education services are eligible for transportation and, of these, about two-thirds use district transportation.

Sara Williams, a kindergarten teacher at Mill Brook, noted that there is a mix of needs for transportation among the students in her class—some are picked up/dropped off by parents, some ride district transportation, and others are transported by private care providers.

Ms. Palley noted that Director of Transportation Terry Crotty has taken a close look at the transportation impacts of such a large additional group at the beginning and end of day at Mill Brook School, and has noted that with the unknown factors, this is difficult to predict.

Superintendent Forsten provided a summary of the steering committee’s work.

- Research has pointed to positive outcomes for young children experiencing high-quality programs
- A critical element in creating high quality early childhood programs is understanding and implementing developmentally appropriate practices
- The research focused mostly on academic achievement impact; challenges to assess for social-emotional impact remain
- Concord School District and community providers offer a wide range of programs, supports, and services for preschoolers and their families.
- The Concord community provides a menu of various options for parents, including all-day child care, part- and full-day kindergarten and before- and after-school care.
- The cost for implementing a full-day kindergarten program is projected to be approximately $1 million annually.
- In the short-term it appears that space is available, although this would require some disruption to existing preschool programs.
- Loss of tuition revenue by community providers would negatively impact some preschool and child care centers.

Comments/questions from Board members, steering committee members, and the public

Ms. Patterson noted that this meeting would be the beginning of the Board’s consideration of full-day kindergarten programming, to begin in the fall. The Board may decide to direct the administration to develop a proposal that the Board will then consider as part of the budget process going forward.
Mr. Croteau noted that kindergarten teachers would be expected to do more teaching differentiation (with more children), and that the Board would need to preserve their planning time, as well as provide and consider the cost of more training for kindergarten teachers to help them with the larger load. He said it would be tough to meet children at their individual levels, and still get the other children in the class to come at their own pace. He suggested that Concord kindergarten teachers visit some schools with full-day kindergarten programs.

Ms. Stuart Gile noted that she found the steering committee process enlightening, sensitive, and very well-planned. She said the report is informative and comprehensive, with data-rich appendices. She reminded the committee of Robert Fulghum’s adage, “All I Ever Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten.”

Betty Hoadley noted that she attended every committee meeting, and asked if the presentation would be available to the public. She pointed out several discrepancies between the PowerPoint and the full report, and noted she would prefer the full report only be posted online. Superintendent Forsten noted that the report will be posted online.

Kristen Van Ostern thanked the committee for its work and its informative report. She said that, while the committee discussed the potential negative impact on providers with loss of tuition, it should also discuss the positive impact on families that would be able to save the cost of care/tuition.

Ms. Palley noted that Mary Jane Wallner, Director of Merrimack County Day Care Services, was clear that costs could potentially rise for families with children under 5 if full-day kindergarten is implemented, as costs for class size/teacher ratios for 5-year-olds help offset the higher costs for children who are younger. Ms. Palley noted that the subcommittee was not able to quantify that impact.

Ms. Hart noted that she and Ms. Hemingway reached out to providers, who are being thoughtful about the potential changes; looking at their programs creatively. Many are already currently adapting their programs, making things more flexible for families. She did note that before- and after-care costs, involving small amounts of time in the morning and in the afternoon, would be higher than maintaining a full-day slot.

Ms. Hemingway noted that local providers asked that the Board let them know as soon as possible if full-day kindergarten will be implemented.

Mr. Richards noted that 63 students are in private kindergarten programs in Concord, and not all may opt to attend public school for kindergarten even if it is available.

Ms. Paddleford noted that, while care costs for the first four years of a child’s life would be more expensive, this could also mean that parents could go back to work full-time one full year earlier, if full-day kindergarten were implemented.

Rusty Cofrin noted that there is little discussion yet about the tax impact, but that consideration of this would play a significant role in Board discussions.
Mr. Cogswell noted that the estimated costs’ impact on the tax rate is a factor the Board must take into consideration, and he, being on a fixed income himself, is cognizant of this.

Elizabeth McCormick noted that full-day kindergarten implementation has been done throughout the state. She said she also supports businesses, and would like to know how other districts did this, and whether it was to the detriment of local businesses.

Ms. Patterson noted that Concord is a larger district than many of the surrounding communities, and impacts of full-day kindergarten might be felt differently in other communities.

Mr. Richards said that he would assume that Hopkinton’s and Bow’s full-day kindergarten programs would have impacted Concord preschools already to a degree, and suggested that the private providers should be queried about this.

Mr. Callanan noted that parents have the option to choose the best programs for their children.

Mr. Cogswell suggested that everyone on the steering committee be notified when the Board discusses this issue further in the fall.

Ms. Stuart Gile noted that at a recent talk at Heritage Heights, a number of prominent Concord residents noted that they had moved to Concord because of the excellent school system.

The Committee voted 3-0 to adjourn (motioned by Ms. Redmond-Scura, seconded by Ms. Kimball).

The committee adjourned at 7:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Patterson
Acting Committee Chair