Concord School District
Joint Instructional and Finance Committees

Date: September 12, 2016

Committee members present: Jennifer Patterson, Acting Chair; Tom Croteau, Alana Kimball, Jim Richards, Barbara Higgins, Nathan Fennessy, Maureen Redmond-Scura

Other Board member present: Clint Cogswell

Others in attendance: Terri Forsten, Superintendent; Donna Palley, Assistant Superintendent; Jack Dunn, Business Administrator

The meeting was called to order at 5:33 p.m. by Instructional Committee acting Chair Jennifer Patterson. The agenda was to continue discussing early childhood education.

Superintendent Forsten noted that two meetings have been scheduled for the initial discussion of early childhood education in Concord. Today’s meeting will allow the committees an opportunity to review the report from the Early Childhood Education Steering Committee, discuss the findings, ask questions and plan next steps. At the second meeting on October 5, the committees hope to hear public comment on the topic.

Ms. Forsten reminded the committees about the guiding question that the Early Childhood Steering Committee addressed: What are the best practices in kindergarten programming and how do these practices connect with early childhood programs in our school community? She noted that the Committee did much of its work within three subcommittees focused on research on best practices, connections with early childhood programs, and district/community impact. Ms. Forsten summarized the findings of the Committee:

- 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.
- Research has focused mostly on academic achievement impact, with challenges in assessing for social-emotional impact.
- Concord School District and our community providers offer a wide range of programs, supports, and services for preschoolers and their families.
- Our 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.
- Cost for implementing a full-day kindergarten program in Concord School District is projected to be approximately $1 million annually.
In the short-term it appears that space is available – this would require some disruption in the existing preschool program.

Loss of tuition revenue by community providers would negatively impact some preschool and child care centers.

Superintendent Forsten indicated that our current configuration of part-day programming for kindergarten allows for 2 hours, 45 minutes of instructional time. A full-day program equal to our other grades, 6 hours, 45 minutes, would allow for an additional 2.5 hours of instructional classroom time, not including lunch, recess and “specials” time or activity during the teachers’ 45-minute planning period. We have between 20 and 23 classroom spaces at each of our elementary schools; six additional classroom spaces would be required and these are available, assuming the relocation of the Mill Brook School preschool to Beaver Meadow School (BMS). Mill Brook School (MBS) would need to use all of the buildings’ classroom spaces if full-day kindergarten were implemented.

In order to implement full-day kindergarten, some curriculum development would need to be undertaken. Kindergarten teachers would need time to revise the educational program. If kindergarten students were expected to participate in art, music and physical education, these teachers would need time to develop an appropriate curriculum.

Estimated costs for additional classroom teachers are $721,227.68. Costs for additional special educational assistants needed by individual students are approximately $184,000. Estimated costs for additional furniture, supplies, technology and specialist teachers are $317,600. The total estimated additional cost for full-day kindergarten is $1.22 million.

Clint Cogswell asked the administration to determine exactly how many specialists would be needed given the current schedules and the expectation that specialists teach 30 classes per week, and also wondered whether Title I could fund the kindergarten. Superintendent Forsten noted that this was not possible unless all schools were identified as Title I school-wide schools. (Currently, only MBS is Title I school-wide.) Target Assistance Title I schools support school-wide programs.

Committee members wondered where the preschool would move if the classrooms at MBS were used for kindergarten. Could other schools house the preschool? Superintendent Forsten noted that there was room to relocate preschool classrooms to BMS and possibly Abbot-Downing School (ADS). Maureen Redmond-Scura noted that additional transportation costs might be associated with moving the preschool outside more students’ neighborhoods. She also noted that preschool parents might make fewer connections with their neighborhood school if their preschool was housed outside the neighborhood.

Barb Higgins noted that the preschool’s classrooms have moved a number of times over the years, so maybe this movement will not be a significant problem. The preschool has been housed at Dame, Eastman, Conant, Rumford, BMS, and MBS.
The Early Childhood Education Steering Committee report indicated that preschool is at least as significant in its positive impact on student development as full-day kindergarten. Committee members questioned how programming can be decided in a way that does not detract from the current preschool options and especially from those populations that significantly benefit from programs. The question of how access to preschool programming could be accomplished without the District taking on the costs, while still offering full-day kindergarten was asked.

Tom Croteau asked what the tax impact would be for an increase of $1.2 million, the projected cost for full-day kindergarten. Business Administrator Jack Dunn indicated that a 1% increase raises approximately $524,000, so the increase would be over 2%, and most of that cost increase would continue into perpetuity. He noted that operating costs continue to rise, and there is no additional revenue identified at this time to offset these increased costs.

Nathan Fennessy indicated that he would like to see a decision-making process for this issue outside of the School Board budget process, so the Board already will have an idea about its direction when it moves into the budget work. He would like this issue not to get lost in the process.

Ms. Redmond-Scura noted that the Early Childhood Education Steering Committee was not looking just at full-day kindergarten, and she expressed concern to ensure the Board does not move too quickly to a discussion of full-day kindergarten only; other possible options should be discussed. Jim Richards agreed that there should be consideration of the important elements before jumping into a decision.

Ms. Redmond-Scura noted that the Board should be careful not to allow the kindergarten classrooms to turn into first grade classrooms; that, for example, play and naps are important for five-year-olds. Mr. Richards noted that individuals other than teachers might oversee naps and playtime.

Superintendent Forsten clarified that napping is not part of a kindergarten-appropriate curriculum. The administration would not want naps to be recommended as part of full-day kindergarten. Play, creativity, and discovery learning are all part of a developmentally appropriate program in kindergarten.

Mr. Richards noted that there may be other activities, monitored by individuals other than teachers, that would allow teachers to receive their 45 minutes of planning time. Mr. Cogswell added that it may be possible for after-school providers or another outside agency to provide supervision for some part of the day.

Mr. Croteau expressed interest in a program that would be beneficial to students and relatively simple to administer. It might involve an extended day model, but perhaps there are options that would provide a different financial picture.

Committee members discussed a timeline and process for making a decision about any new early childhood programs to be offered in 2017-2018. Time will be needed for curriculum development, although much of this would happen in the summer. Mr.
Fennessy noted that parents must make decisions about childcare arrangements very early, and so as much lead time as possible should be given to them. Superintendent Forsten offered that the district should be considerate of community providers who may need to make adjustments in their programs. Mr. Fennessy suggested that a date be set for decision-making in October or November, and that the administration bring a proposal or two to the joint committee, perhaps including options for extended day and full-day with various components, along with a recommendation for adoption.

Ms. Redmond-Scura reiterated that there should be a full discussion of other options in addition to full-day kindergarten, including extended day programming, public/private partnerships, and more seamless transitions.

Ms. Patterson suggested that the committee establish a date this fall by which a decision on early childhood education would be made. She suggested that the administration bring one or more fully developed proposals to the joint committee, addressing concerns such as how to ensure developmentally appropriate programs (for example, not make kindergarten class look like first grade), how to provide teachers with planning time if young students attend full-day programs, how to support community preschools, and how to make the transition to afterschool care seamless for parents. The administration would identify the pros and cons of each proposal.

Ms. Redmond-Scura noted that the Board should not negatively impact what the District is already doing with early childhood as a result of any new action.

Ms. Patterson noted that the Board will want to look at financial considerations, including the costs of any new programs within the context of other budget needs. There is a need to look at all that is currently being done in the schools. If the Board looked at new early childhood programs separately, it would allow the tax rate to increase by 2% even before recognizing other needs. She noted that there are some very significant costs projected independent of this area.

Mr. Cogswell noted that if the Board will not consider changing its class size guidelines, there are not many places to look for one million dollars, and recalled the previous year’s considerations about possible cuts. He noted, however, that he is hearing from the business community that full-day kindergarten is important to help bring professionals into the community.

Mr. Richards asked whether there were any one-time expenses coming in the next year’s budget beyond those under discussion this fall. Mr. Dunn responded that the technology budget is expected to increase, as the elementary iPads, going on five years old, will likely need to be replaced.

Committee members discussed various aspects of a potential change from part- to full-day kindergarten, including the need for additional lunch periods. Mr. Cogswell wondered whether it would be possible to partner with the current afterschool providers, Concord YMCA and Boys & Girls Club, to provide care for kindergarteners.
in the schools if their day ended earlier than the other grades, but was longer than the current schedule.

Committee members agreed that they will plan to come to a decision about early childhood education before the administration develops the 2017-2018 budget, and agreed that they would continue to discuss this issue at the joint meeting on October 5. The Board will hear about the property valuation at the end of October, and this will provide information that will be important to the decision about the impact of changing early childhood programming costs. The joint committee could have another meeting on November 2 if more time is needed to discuss the issue. Committee members agreed to have an open discussion of this issue at the monthly Board meeting on November 7, with an expectation of a decision for moving forward at that time.

   The committee voted 4-0 to adjourn at 6:58 p.m. (moved by Mr. Fennessy, seconded by Mr. Richards).

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Patterson, Acting Chair

Donna Palley, Recorder