

Concord School District Board of Education  
**Public Hearing 2 – Rundlett Middle School**  
**March 12, 2018**

**Board members present:** Jennifer Patterson, *President*, Clint Cogswell, Tom Croteau, Chuck Crush, Liza Poinier, Maureen Redmond-Scura, Jim Richards, Pam Wicks, Nathan Fennessy

**Administration:** *Superintendent* Terri L. Forsten, *Assistant Superintendent* Donna Palley, *Business Administrator* Jack Dunn, *Director of Human Resources* Larry Prince

Board President Jennifer Patterson called the public hearing to order at 7:00 p.m., introducing the second of two Public Hearings scheduled to review and receive public comment on the proposed FY19 budget. Superintendent Terri Forsten reviewed the agenda:

- Budget 2018–2019 goals
- Full-day kindergarten (FDK) programs
- Budget reductions
- Expenditures
- Revenues
- Budget summary
- Other considerations – unknowns
- Upcoming work sessions
- Questions – public comment

Superintendent Forsten reviewed the goals of the budget:

- Regular education
  - Maintain class sizes within the guidelines of School Board Policy #641
  - Respond in a responsible manner to changes in student enrollment
  - Include FDK
- Curriculum, instruction, & assessment
  - Continue STEM development
  - Continue software application – Dream Box and Lexia
  - Development for FDK
- Student Services
  - Develop special education leadership to support staff supervision and program development
  - Improve support to students with serious social, emotional and behavioral challenges and autism

- Pick up some components of SAMHSA grant as it sunsets
- Technology
  - Maintain 1:1 devices for all students\* (with the exception of kindergarten, which is approximately 3 students per iPad)
  - Continue to replace teacher laptops
  - Replace elementary iPads
- Debt service
  - Maintain 5% of the operating budget for debt service

Superintendent Forsten reviewed the process by which FDK would be implemented by the District:

- Fall 2015: the Board formed a Steering Committee to research effective early childhood education and FDK programs
- Spring 2016: the Early Childhood Education Steering Committee offered a report of their findings, [Early Childhood Education Steering Committee Findings 2016](#)
- Fall 2016: the Board considered five options for developing early childhood education programs, [Options for Developing Early Childhood Programs 2016](#)
- Spring 2017: the New Hampshire Legislature voted to increase state adequacy by \$1100 per student enrolled in FDK programs, to begin in the fall of 2018
- Summer 2017: District kindergarten teachers met to develop ideas for FDK curriculum and instruction
- The Board requested that the FY19 Budget include FDK program costs

Superintendent Forsten reviewed the costs associated with FDK, including itinerant staff and furniture, supplies and equipment, explaining that these staff members will travel among the four schools with FDK programs. With a low-end estimate of \$912,895 and a high-end estimate of \$1,229,848, the FY19 proposed budget for FDK is \$1,118,312.29. Superintendent Forsten noted that as staff has not yet been hired, this number is still just a projection. She emphasized the importance of kindergarten/grade 1 registration, as the administration will use this information to review how many kindergarten classrooms and staff members will be needed. She added that schools have been asked to open registration earlier than usual this year to assist with this planning.

Business Administrator Jack Dunn reviewed expenditures and revenues for FY18 and FY19, emphasizing the particular challenges of trying to incorporate FDK into the budget last year during the heating conversion away from Concord Steam and amidst dramatically increasing NH Retirement System costs. He reviewed revenue, including the transfer of Community Education to the City of Concord, and a reduction in the unreserved fund balance. He noted that this year's revenue deficit was only \$11,000, compared to last year's \$1.1 million, which underscored the significance of last year's budget challenges.

Superintendent Forsten reviewed staff changes, including several elementary teacher and administrative staff reductions, additional kindergarten staff, and the increase of a .5 teacher

position in the Superintendent's contingency line to cover an additional teaching position should the need arise due to class sizes.

Mr. Dunn reviewed FY19 major funds, including the general fund, food service and grant funding, explaining that the general fund is what affects the local tax rate, and showing an overall increase of 2.08% over last year's budget. The general fund breakdown is as follows:

<b>Salaries and benefits:</b>	<b>\$63,225,618</b>
• Increase due to salary steps, increases and FDK	+1,165,774
• Increase in benefits	+422,608
• Increase in life/disability	+52,500
• Increase in dental	+\$12,558
• Decrease in unemployment	(10,000)
<b>Contracted services, maintenance supplies, equipment:</b>	<b>\$11,064,954</b>
• Increase in out-of-district tuition	(249,293)
• Decrease computer lease	(96,158)
• Decrease due to natural gas	(37,300)
• Increase in software	+37,890
• Increase in summer projects	+125,000
<b>Debt service:</b>	<b>\$5,875,669</b>
• Decrease in debt service	(109,951)
<b>Dues, fees and transfers:</b>	<b>\$1,625,709</b>
• Transfer \$805,322 into the Facilities Stabilization Fund	

Superintendent Forsten reviewed Special Education costs, noting that 763 students aged 3-21 are in the District's special education program, which has represented approximately 15% of overall student enrollment for several years. Seventy-eight students receive services out of district, which includes community preschools, special education placements (K-12), charter schools and Second Start. She noted an increase in in-district special education costs in the amount of \$141,942 which reflects a decrease in out-of-district tuition and an increase in the number of educational assistants. She explained an increase of \$1,022,099 for behavior-autism contracted services, which represents an increase in the numbers of significantly behaviorally challenged students needing Behavior Specialist support, and increased support for students returning from out-of-district placements.

Mr. Dunn reviewed New Hampshire Retirement System costs, noting that contributions have increased over several years and that this trend would likely continue. New rates are set for two years, so the next rate setting in October 2019 would affect the FY20 budget.

- Employer rates:**
- Teacher rate: **17.36%**
    - Increased from 15.67% to 17.36% in FY18
  - Non-Teacher rate: **11.38%**
    - Increased from 11.08% to 11.38% in FY18

- Budget impact:**
- No rate increase for FY19

**Employee rates:**

- Increased from 5% to 7% in 2012

Mr. Dunn reviewed debt service, noting a decrease in interest on debt. He explained that, since 2005, the Board has tried to maintain a level capital debt service of 5% to avoid spikes in the tax rate. He reviewed summaries of the budget by function and object, and revenue sources, which include local and state taxes, state and federal funds, transfers, and unreserved fund balance. He provided a breakdown of local and state taxes, explaining that this would amount to a 1.99% increase for FY18, with an estimated tax impact of \$78 on a \$250,000 home. He noted that this does not include county or city taxes, which the District does not control.

Mr. Dunn reviewed other considerations and unknown factors for next year's budget planning, which include:

**Board**

- Negotiations 2017-2018: five collective bargaining groups (*Teachers, Educational Assistants, Maintenance – Transportation Association, \* Admin Assistants and Food Service*)
  - Settled *Maintenance – Transportation Association (MTA)* on February 12, 2018
- Enrollment – demographic study
- Concord High School – road construction on streets (Warren, North Fruit, Woodman, Westbourne)
- Catastrophic Aid (*special education*)
- Adequacy – *current year: \$3,636.08 for full-time students, and \$2,918.04 for full-day kindergarteners*
- Capital improvements (*Rundlett Middle School and other facility improvements*)
- Declining enrollment (*this is predicted to be somewhat steady – 1% annually*) – *impact on revenue (\$3,636 per student as of current year)*
- Appropriation for safety and security grant

**City**

- Budget
- Commercial and residential real growth

**State**

- Legislation – vouchers related to SB 193, and others

**Federal**

- Medicaid funding
- Title I funding
- After school program funding
- Charter and private school funding

The meeting was then opened for public comment.

Bailey and Annabelle Chislett – these CMS students stated that they do not want any more students in their classes as it is already hard to get work done in a class with 22-23 students, as there are many distractions.

Heidi Crumrine – mother of three children in the District and English teacher at CHS. She said she felt conflicted about speaking as she is a District employee, but was speaking as a taxpayer and parent. She said that the state does not adequately fund education, so the onus falls on the Board to make decisions that impact both students and taxpayers. She said she is very concerned about increasing class sizes in the upper elementary grades. Her older daughter received Title I support to help bring her up to grade-appropriate reading level, and she does not see how individualized support can continue with larger classes. Her younger daughter is reading above grade level, and support for her needs would also be difficult with more children per class. She said she would hate for FDK - which was instituted to help level the playing field for the District's youngest learners – lead to larger classes to the detriment of other elementary students.

Michael Komorek – teacher at BGS and parent of BGS 4<sup>th</sup> grader. His daughter has stated that she does not want to be in class with more students. He said he feels strongly as a teacher and parent about not cutting teachers and increasing class size as the education of students very similar to his own child would be negatively affected. BGS has many students with intensive needs including behavioral issues, autism, and ELL students needing extra classroom assistance. Teachers do their best every day to meet all their students' needs, and additional students would create a great deal of extra pressure to serve all these needs adequately. He said it is hard to hear that his daughter does not want to be in the classroom, and hard as a teacher to add students to his already-sizeable class.

Matt Finney – lifelong Concord resident, graduate of Concord High School, and 20-year teacher at BGS. He said he was representing the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade team at BGS, who wanted to express concern over losing a classroom teacher and felt they were uniquely qualified to address these ramifications as they work with this unique student population daily. While eliminating a 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher might seem like a solution in terms of the budget, they said it was important to understand the needs of the current 3<sup>rd</sup> grade class: 20% are ELL students needing additional academic support, another 20% have IEPs, another 20% receive Title I reading support. Going from six classes to five will negatively impact student growth, given the significant needs of this class. He implored the Board to consider these issues while making decisions. He added that the current fifth grade class began as seven sections in first grade, went to six sections in second-third grade, and was now being asked to go to five sections, with class sizes increasing accordingly.

Liz Finney – Concord taxpayer, 17-year 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher at BGS, and CSD parent. She said she supports FDK as early education is very important, but does not feel this benefit should come at the cost of older students in the District. She said that adding 3-4 students per class might not seem like much, and it might not be if all were typical students with the same needs; however, BGS classes have a large array of socioeconomic and learning needs, including ELL students, Title I, homeless students, etc. In order to meet these needs, curriculum has been specially developed, which is rigorous for teachers. The more students per class, the larger the range of needs, and the harder it is for teachers to meet those needs. This is already a challenging task and adding more children would make this task nearly impossible. Classroom management also becomes more difficult with so many different

personalities and social needs. She implored the Board to look beyond numbers, as each number represents an individual child, when making this decision.

Sarah Sadowski – CSD parent of two children. She said she does not support the elimination of any teaching positions and stated the need to ensure that all children have educational resources. She said she was willing for this choice to be reflected in her property tax bill.

Margrethe Fjelsted – Concord taxpayer, homeowner, and mother of four children, the oldest an ADS student. She echoed previous thanks to Board members for their hard work. She said she did not support FDK because young children need more unstructured, free play rather than structured classroom time. She cited a 2015 Stanford study which showed children who delayed kindergarten and instead began school at age 7 had reduced ADD issues by 73% at age 11. She said her son has 20 students in his kindergarten classroom, and she feels it is impossible to have free, unstructured play in such a large group. She said that while kindergarten is an important piece of early education, it should not be the primary focus. With the District's commitment to providing educational support to students, half-day kindergarten should remain an option for families who want to be able to provide this unstructured play and learning time for their children. She agreed wholeheartedly with all comments made regarding the importance of class size.

Kristen Zaffini said she would email her comments to the Board.

Miiko Bradley – Concord resident and taxpayer. He said he appreciates the fiscal responsibilities of the Board. He stated that he moved to Concord specifically for its quality educational system, has personally experienced both public and private school, and is a strong advocate for public school. He said he has not heard anything from the Board about how schools will counteract potential negative effects of larger classes, and wanted the Board to be upfront about what will be done.

Kaitlyn Witts and Max and Mason Hoover – mother of three boys in the District, a PTA member and school volunteer. She stated that teachers are not social workers, and that the teachers she has met take their job very seriously and try to evaluate each student individually. She said she believed doing this for 24-26 students per class is a nearly impossible task.

Max Hoover said it was already difficult to stay engaged in class with so many students and that he cannot imagine having more students in class and still being able to learn.

Mason Hoover said that his mom is stressed to ensure he and his brothers get their reading and play done each day and cannot imagine how difficult it must be for teachers doing this for 24-28 students.

Liza Dube – taxpayer and mother of two students in the District, one of whom will be attending kindergarten this fall. She said she ran for a Board seat last fall and, as a result, spoke to many voters in her area, all of whom were in support of FDK. She said she was very pleased and grateful that FDK was included in the coming year's budget.

Matt Masur – Concord taxpayer and CSD parent. Mr. Masur said he was happy to pay for these programs and teachers with his tax dollars, and that the tax impact seemed like a

pittance to fund these programs and staff that contribute to children's education. He said the real tax impact in dollars would be quite small compared to its impact on Concord students.

Bernie Masur – CSD student. He said it is already difficult for teachers with 20 students in class and would be even harder with an additional 6-8 students in a class.

Rachel Goldwasser – CSD parent. She thanked the Board for its work on FDK and was grateful that the District acknowledged the importance of FDK. She said she felt class size guidelines should be re-evaluated given the modern demands of curriculum and student needs, and that these are no longer the needs and classrooms of 30 years ago, when those guidelines were developed. She asked the Board to consider the implications of class size, and asked if fifth-grade class sizes of 26 students should be normalized. She said she understood this was a challenging process and asked that the Board address these issues going forward. She was also concerned about communication from the administration, with the example that her child's school lost federal funding for snacks this year and she found about it only by running into a teacher at the supermarket who happened to mention that her students were hungry. She said she felt that better communication around these issues would help the community better support the schools; for example, school PTAs could help raise money for snacks or similar funding issues that could arise.

Jason Longval – Concord resident and taxpayer for 16 years, parent of two young children about to enter the District. He spoke to the importance of investing in children and echoed earlier comments about the actual tax dollar impact being small, even if it were doubled, to help maintain both FDK and current class sizes.

Michael Pelletier – Concord taxpayer, CMS teacher and District parent. Mr. Pelletier said he was concerned about the physical space required for the additional fifth-grade classes – he pointed out that fifth-grade students are larger and space is already quite full in the 800-square-foot classrooms. He said he knows that the District prides itself on innovation, but larger classes of 25-26 are not innovative, especially given the trend of teaching in small groups. He said his daughter has struggled with reading but does not qualify for Title I services, and benefits from the small-group reading setting. He said he worried about students like her not receiving the attention and boost they need to succeed and indicated he was willing to pay tax dollars to support both FDK and the upper elementary students, as they should not have to sacrifice their education.

Michael Drumm – Concord resident and parent. Mr. Drum was concerned about the educational and social aspects of larger classes. One of his sons was in an accident last year and was in a body cast and wheelchair. He said that there might not be enough physical space for students like this if additional children were added to a classroom. He said he was willing to pay more in taxes to not increase class sizes and to not cut teachers.

Adam (parent) and Frances (student) Lesser – Concord residents. Frances' class last year had 27 students, which Mr. Lesser said he understood was within District policy, but given that the class size policy was developed over 30 years ago, felt it was perhaps time to revisit it.

Helmut Koch – Concord resident and parent of grown children. Mr. Koch thanked Board members for their service, for FDK, and for STEM initiatives. He said he was proud of the

work done by the District. He stated that he was on the Second Start Board and the advisory board at a community college, that his wife is former educator, and that they have many friends who are educators. He echoed previous comments about class size. He stated that he was speaking as a senior on a fixed income and understood this financial challenge but felt that adjusting class sizes was the right thing to do because investing in children is the best thing a community can do. He noted that Concord was a destination for families because of its excellent education, especially special education.

Lindsay Hanson and Emily Johnson – Concord taxpayers and homeowners. Both work for Save the Children Action Network. They strongly support FDK and were thankful to the Board for including it in the budget this year, and were in support of smaller class sizes.

Nicole (parent) and Cate (student) Fox – Cate is a CMS fourth-grader and stated that she cares about her and other children's education. She thinks FDK is very important, as well as keeping class sizes from increasing. Nicole noted that she has two other children in the District and echoed previous comments in support of FDK, but not at the cost of the upper elementary students. She said that more, and needier, students in class would take teacher attention from typical students and felt that if these larger class size numbers were within guidelines, perhaps it was time to revisit those guidelines.

Christy Dolat Bartlett – a NH house representative from East Concord, she offered a perspective from the State side. She said she was happy to invest in children, as they are the future, and that on a state level, legislators were struggling to attract and keep young families in the state. FDK would be an important draw to Concord, as well as keeping half-day kindergarten an option. Implementing FDK in the school system would allow area daycare centers to open up more spots for infants, which is a real need in the community. She explained the school voucher system, whereby public school funds would be used to pay for families to send their children to private schools and added that this bill would likely be passed by the state and would likely affect public school funding. She said she was happy that her tax dollars go to support public education for this community.

Jody McLaughlin – educator in the District, a recent and enthusiastic transplant to Concord, homeowner, taxpayer, parent of two District students. She said she was happy to pay taxes to provide both FDK and keep upper elementary class sizes down.

Ken Fitzenmeyer – Concord taxpayer, educator in another district. Mr. Fitzenmeyer said he was concerned about class sizes, particularly at the middle school level, as middle school students are a challenging age group. He asked why the District would consider staff cuts when enrollment has increased there.

Pete Meyer – parent of three students, including one with special needs. He said he was in full support of FDK. He was concerned about class size and the attention students may not receive. He said the District looks great on paper but that the administration and the Board need to be always thinking about the students and the teacher attention they receive.

Katie Carpenter – parent of two students in the District and a former District student herself, District employee in special education. She asked attendees to pause for 20 seconds to consider special needs students, who could take that long to process a direction or

instruction. She noted that this needs to be taken into consideration as Concord is an inclusion-forward district with the goal of including special education students in regular classrooms. Her daughter at RMS feels her classes are loud and hectic sometimes, and that help is not always available with so many students for teachers to attend to. Education is difficult in large classes both for special education and regular students, as well as teachers. She suggested more classroom aides could help with larger classes if teacher cuts do pass and asked that the Board please keep these factors in mind.

Cameron (no last name stated) – RMS student. He said class sizes were already quite large. With several special education students in his class, he sees his teacher bouncing around from student to student but with so many, not every student who needs help can get it.

Suzanne (no last name stated) – parent of BGS fourth-grader. The current number of classes allows for groups of students to be broken up more easily to balance burden on teachers; fewer classes with more students will make this more difficult.

Christine Vaillancourt – Concord taxpayer and parent of incoming kindergartner. She came to meetings excited about FDK but was not aware of the class size issues and that FDK could come at the expense of several teachers. As a former educator in another district, she has worked in a middle school and understands the challenge of teaching that age group and the benefit of smaller class sizes. She said if changes cannot be made this year, they could be made in subsequent years, so all students would receive quality education and attention.

Brenda Clark – social studies teacher for 22 years, parent of third and first graders. She asked the Board to give a non-monetary reason why increased class sizes would benefit each student and asked that they consider students as individuals rather than numbers.

Jessica Thompson – a parent of two CSD students and educational assistant at BMS, she was speaking as a parent and a teacher. As a former District substitute who has experienced the challenges of having 22-26 students in a classroom, she empathized with the teachers who work with such large groups daily. She said it is impossible to teach that many students with so many different needs.

Board members thanked the public for their attendance and thoughtful comments.

**The Board voted unanimously to adjourn (motioned by Mr. Richards, seconded by Mr. Croteau).**

The meeting adjourned at 9:02 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Maureen Redmond-Scura, *Secretary*