

GREENFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS
SCHOOL COMMITTEE

BUDGET WORK SESSION

(Held right after a public forum at Greenfield Middle School Auditorium)

Minutes

February 26, 2009

Voted and approved April 9, 2009

Present: Chairman Dalton Athey; committee members: Greg Aubin, Maryelen Calderwood, Donovan Eastman, Mayor Forgey, John Lunt. Also present, interim Superintendent Hollins, Director of Special Services Kathi Titus, approximately 20 members of the public, and press. Absent was Doris Doyle.

- I. Call to Order: With a quorum present, Chairman Athey called the school committee to order at 7:51 p.m.
- II. Special Education Funding. The chairman asked that special education and special education budget and funding be discussed.

Superintendent Hollins handed out subsets of the budget with details of special education spending and introduced the topic, explaining that she and Administrator Titus both have backgrounds in general and special education administration, and are able to discuss theory and best practice together.

Chairman Athey asked what the district's philosophy should be for providing special education services and setting goals for the school district. Administrator Kathi Titus stated the best way to provide for the majority of students with special education needs is to invest in general education. Common planning time with regular classroom teachers; effective instruction and flexible grouping techniques; curriculum resources to accommodate multiple levels within a classroom; assistive technology (low- and high-tech)—training and resources in all of these help reduce the amount of necessary services & placements, including out-of-district placements.

Out-of-district special education tuition is budgeted at a lower level for FY10, not necessarily due to serving fewer students. Special Education summer services are budgeted at the 2007-2008 level, which is lower than the expenses of this past summer, during the turmoil.

Superintendent Hollins said you could best consider special education services and expenditures if you consider students in three broad categories. The first category is students with minimal needs who require minimal services (in this category schools find students who have not developed sufficient reading and math skills for reasons other than having a learning disability). This group can be helped by providing supports as part of the mainstream program, e.g. a learning and study support center. If the students have immediate options for learning and reading skill support, other

than special education, more children in this category will not be referred for special services. The second category are students with moderate needs and the third category are students with the most significant needs, where most people do not disagree about the need for significant services.

Generally, administrators agreed that good district goals are boosting the levels of reading & math district wide. Also, having some higher tech options for courses in middle and high school alternative programs is being discussed. Reinstigate regular half days allowing regular and special education teachers to plan curriculum jointly will allow the dialogue that should address the need for students to be more successful in regular classes.

The district can make more general learning centers available that benefit all children. A diagnosis of a clinical special need wouldn't be needed to receive help and support if there were more general learning centers and more students could have the learning skills support they might need. Advancing basic skills is really important since lack of basic skills is a high predictor of dropout dynamics in high school. Under-performing in school sets a child on the path to special education. The number of students needing clinical diagnoses to receive services would likely be reduced when more supports are provided, especially in reading and language arts.

Regarding out-of-district placements, Administrator Titus was asked if a goal was serving more students locally. Yes. While money spent on one student out-of-district benefits that one student, when the funding is spent locally, more students benefit from local resources. She said this type of change is a slow process.

The superintendent stated the district is looking to open two more kindergarten classes with anticipated grant funding in order to lower kindergarten class size. If grant funding allows, other initiatives will include a director of elementary reading, curriculum coordination through stipends for each building to have a literacy coordinator and data analysis coordinator..

Nancy Putnam, K-5 math coordinator, expressed concern that Title I teachers had been reduced from ten (10) teachers. Superintendent Hollins stated more grant funds may be available under the federal stimulus package, including additional Title I funds.

III. Greg Aubin moved to adjourn, John Lunt seconded; motion passed unanimously at 8:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Marcia Day,
Recording Secretary