

Reporter: Peggy Wargelin
Date of Meeting Reported On: 12/13/17
Meeting: FinCom/SC Budget Subcommittee
Agenda attached to this email.

Wally chaired the meeting. Minutes for the 11/28/17 meeting were approved. This meeting was spent discussing the results of more-detailed investigations into available data and possible categories which might be used for meaningful benchmarking. In the future, since there will be a defined list of metrics to keep updated and each will naturally fall under FinCom, SC, or BoS, compiling benchmarking data for future years will hopefully not be too overwhelming. No one committee will have to do it all.

Transportation - We have land area for each town and can get #road miles. Since some towns charge fees, it's difficult to use RADAR data which only shows net transportation costs. We need to see how large an effect on costs the fees are; if they are, say, <5% of the differences in total cost, we can include that in a footnote. It would be much better to simply compile DESE data instead of trying to adjust it for differences like fees, not only to reduce the effort of compiling the data each year but to keep things as transparent as possible. Maybe try to extrapolate per pupil per trip fee to compare? Probably best to wait to see what largest cost factors are, since this may not turn out to be one of the large cost drivers.

For next meeting: See where the biggest variations are between towns and which influence the costs the most. Determine the best way to present the data with the largest effect on costs. Get update on state data.

Teacher Contracts - Teacher contracts were obtained, but a few may have been updated very recently, so working to get most recent before doing complete analysis. The plan is to only use "Group A" employee information from the contracts because it gives a clean number that is standard between towns. (Different towns define other employees, e.g., non-certified staff, paraprofessionals, aides, etc., differently. Perhaps we can look at a cost comparison between towns for this kind of staff in a sidebar. Perhaps it would be interesting to look at the cost of these employees over time in our own towns to see if lower parent volunteer rates mean we are having to employ more of these staff?)

Some discussion about if you can usefully use some combination of teacher cost and class size on average to quantify how significant to bottom line the four-course teacher load at CCHS is. One issue with using averages is that class size can vary a lot between core classes and electives. Sometimes it's difficult to decide how many students are necessary to run an elective class; it's a trade off between cost to budget and class availability for students' interests. For benchmarking, need to use DESE numbers. The fact is though, it takes CCHS 1.25 FTEs to deliver 5 class periods for a student and 1 FTE for the same service in other districts. This also affects class availability. While the effect of the high school teacher load on the budget decreases if you are looking at K-12 budgets, it is still significant for discussion and contract negotiations.

For next meeting: Obtain updated town contracts and analyze all to find key differences in costs. Determine what numbers can be presented in table form and what information needs to be more

qualitative/footnotes. Priorities are: teaching workload, sections/bodies per teacher, medical insurance, sick day buyback unwinding, salary steps/lanes. Show first attempt of comparisons of interesting similarities/differences between towns, even if they are not cost drivers, e.g., student populations and faculty age groups.

Technology - It seems to be a small component of the overall budget and is complicated to get a useful comparison, but the topic is of great interest so needs to be covered. Data for about 5 years is available with a lot of work from different line items in town budget books.

For next meeting:

Continue looking into how comparison towns document technology expenses, and try to find a clean way to compare towns. Since it is very labor intensive to find numbers, decide exactly what to look for and have for next meeting.

OPEB - Will be ready with data at next meeting.

Regional School comparisons - Still working on how best to show data; probably not useful just as columns. Found a source for historical tax burden per household for MA towns, and will try to put together property tax growth rate for each town for the last 10 or so years. There is also data for what % of households spend more than 30% of their income on cost of shelter (renters and owners) which can be used as a proxy for the % of people struggling in each town. Can get tax burden, average house value, and median house value in each town for current year only. DoR provides current average family tax bill and total tax levy increases (including businesses) and town income. Census data provides some additional data, but it is older and we aren't sure if it includes our prison population; need to validate. Concord runs a local census, but we would need to call each town individually to get their data. Perhaps check to see if any comparison towns have had population growth and if that influenced their costs.

Next meeting is Thursday, January 4th at 7:30am at Ripley. At meeting the goal is try to decide what data to present and how to show it. Probably use a spreadsheet, some tables, and a narrative. Footnotes will be used for items we know are interesting to citizens, but turn out have costs which were statistically irrelevant to overall bottom line.