

**Statement by the Concord School Committee
and the Concord-Carlisle Regional School Committee
February 21, 2012**

The School Committees would like to make sure that everyone has up-to-date information regarding the intertwined issues of the school budgets, the high school building project, and transportation options.

School Budgets

One of the primary responsibilities of the School Committees is to develop budgets that meet the educational needs of our students and are respectful of the taxpayers. Since the CCHS capital building project was approved in November 2011, the Committees have been especially mindful of the increased tax impact on the citizens of Concord and Carlisle. We face many fiscal challenges this year and into the foreseeable future. These include increasing student enrollment, contractually obligated salary increases, rising energy and benefit expenses, and increasing special education costs. We are dedicated to preserving the quality of our strong academic program while balancing operating budget challenges.

Budget Process

Every year, the school administration and School Committees prepare operating budgets for Concord Public Schools (CPS) and the Concord-Carlisle Regional School District (CCRS). These are presented and discussed in a series of meetings in the fall with the Concord and Carlisle Finance Committees. In Concord, the Finance Committee follows a formal procedure to evaluate budget requests by the school administration and the Town Manager. The Concord Finance Committee develops a guideline for the allocation of funding to CPS, CCRS, and Town government. A similar process takes place in Carlisle.

On December 13, 2011, the Concord-Carlisle Regional School Committee and Concord School Committee voted and approved a recommended budget for the 2012-13 school year (FY13). There is currently a gap between the budgets that the School Committees approved and the Concord Finance Committee's FY13 guidelines.

The table below represents a high-level view of the FY13 proposed budgets; detailed budget information is posted at www.concordpublicschools.net. Note that the budgets below as recommended by the School Committees are within the levy limit and do not require Proposition 2½ overrides.

2012-13 Operating Budgets	School Committee Recommended Budget	Concord Finance Committee Guideline Budget	Gap
CPS	\$29,755,538	\$29,424,200	\$331,328
% Change	4.50%	3.34%	
CCRS	\$23,647,387	\$23,561,065	\$86,322
% Change	1.78%	1.41%	
CPS + CCRS	\$53,402,925	\$52,985,265	\$417,650
% Change	3.28%	2.47%	

Legally contracted salary obligations for teachers and staff comprise the majority of the high school budget increase. The FY13 budget request for CCRSD is benefitting this year from a reduction of \$222,710 in the special education services area, due to decreased out-of-district placements. We do not expect to receive that amount of savings in subsequent years. The regional high school will also experience an enrollment shift for 2012-13 (70.39% for FY12 to 71.77% for FY13) that impacts the Concord assessment.

The \$331,328 gap for CPS is far more significant. The CPS budget has seen minimal increases for the past three years (2.8% for FY12, 0.0% for FY11, 1.8% for FY10). We are under tremendous pressure for FY13 primarily due to an \$800,000 increase in special education services. The district has little control over these costs since these services are mandated by the state and federal government. For the FY13 budget proposed by the School Committee, one band teacher was cut and reductions were made in art, music, and physical education (\$74,924). Supplies, materials, and services were cut by \$55,976. In order to meet the Concord Finance Committee's guidelines, additional significant cuts and/or reductions would still be required to teachers and teacher support. These additional reductions could include: library aides (3), orchestra teacher (1), maintenance personnel (2), support staff/administrative (4), consultant services, professional development, and instructional materials.

In future years, we expect the CPS and CCRSD budgets will come under additional strain as increasing student enrollment and significant, new (already identified) special education services add to the costs. As a result, the School Committees and school administration are looking at every way possible to manage expenses in a sustainable trajectory.

High School Building Project

Since 2001, citizens of both Concord and Carlisle have been working to secure state funding for a high school building project. There have been a number of recent milestones:

- April/May 2010: Funding was approved for a CCHS Feasibility Study/Schematic Design at both Concord and Carlisle Town Meetings and at the polls.
- June 2010: CCHS Building Committee formed.
- September 2011: After reviewing more than 30 different options, the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) approved a single, specific design for a new Concord-Carlisle High School. The MSBA committed to \$28,000,000 of reimbursement funding for the \$92,500,000 project.
- November 2011: The Towns voted 84% in favor to overwhelmingly approve the CCHS building project in Special Town Meetings and at the polls.

Construction will commence in the summer of 2012 and will be completed in 2015. During construction, access to the high school campus will be limited. The location of the new high school and construction zone will directly impact the tennis courts and junior varsity field, and will result in permanent removal of the structures that support transportation services: bus repair and maintenance building, fuel storage and pumping station, bus parking area and administration trailer. The cost to replace the tennis courts, junior varsity field, and impacts on transportation services are not covered in the MSBA-approved budget. Therefore, these costs could not be included in the \$92.5 million debt exclusion for the project.

School Transportation Services

The goal of the School Committees and school administration is to provide safe, reliable busing for students. When the impact of the high school building project on the transportation facility was first indicated, the school administration, with the approval of the School Committees, began to explore options for busing students for the 2012-13 school year and beyond. The administration first inquired into the availability of Town maintenance facilities and was assured multiple times by the Concord Town Manager that these are at, or past, capacity. Many neighboring districts, including Carlisle, Bedford, Sudbury, Lincoln, Lexington, Wayland, and Wellesley, use private bus companies to transport their students. In November 2011, the administration issued an Invitation to Bid for busing services for CPS and CCRSD to determine if there would be a cost savings that could be applied to the FY13 and subsequent budgets.

At the Joint School Committee meeting on January 24, 2012, the school administration presented the results of the bid process and recommended that the School Committee consider using a private vendor to provide busing services. The administration then held a Public Forum on February 1 to hear opinions and to answer questions from citizens. The forum was well attended and lasted several hours. Upon further consideration, the administration chose to withdraw the Invitation to Bid issued in November 2011.

Joint School Committee Meeting 2/14/12

The School Committees convened on February 14, 2012, to discuss the transportation issue at length. An important goal of this meeting was to address the questions and concerns we heard from the community around transportation services and to provide the community with a larger budget context for our planning process. After a 4-hour long discussion, the School Committees reached agreement on two options:

1. Both the Concord School Committee and the Concord Carlisle Regional School Committee voted unanimously to authorize the school administration to issue an RFP for the leasing of a maintenance facility for the buses and the school-owned vehicles for the 2012-2013 school year. It is not known at this point if a suitable facility can be found and secured. The cost to lease and prepare a facility is estimated at \$100,000. If this path is ultimately chosen, the FY13 school budgets will need to include the additional \$100,000 expense for the leasing of a bus maintenance facility and costs related to that transition. Incurring this additional cost would increase the Concord Finance Committee's FY13 guideline gap from a combined \$417,650 to \$517,650 for CPS and CCRSD.
2. The School Committees also voted unanimously to authorize the administration to prepare an Invitation to Bid for private transportation services that includes the sale of the districts' fleet of buses. Following up on the results of November's Invitation to Bid, the administration discovered that one of the primary reasons more bids were not received was because the original Invitation to Bid provided for the districts to maintain ownership of the bus fleet. Therefore, we concluded that by selling the buses, a wider range of private bus companies might submit bids. This is a back-up plan. If a rental facility cannot be secured to maintain our vehicles, private maintenance services are deemed too costly, or the FY13 school budgets are not approved at appropriate levels to preserve academic programs, then immediate action will then need to be taken to provide busing

for students in September 2012. Should these events occur, we will be in a position to immediately request bids for private transportation services.

At the meeting, there was a long discussion about the school budgets and how they relate to the transportation issue. Fiscal pressures have forced us to review and evaluate any cost-containment measures that could contribute to sustainable budget growth. As part of this process, the School Committees need to evaluate long-term options for transportation services. The School Committees intend to have further conversations with the Concord Finance Committee with the hope of convincing the Committee to recommend our budget level. Even with the additional \$100,000 potential increase for a rental maintenance facility, the school budget requests would fall within the Concord FY13 levy limit and not require an override.

Looking Forward

At the next Joint School Committee meeting on February 28, 2012, we will review the FY13 budgets again and hear the results of the search for a rental facility. The School Committees will have further discussions about the appropriate budget levels to propose at Concord and Carlisle Town Meetings. At this stage, there are many unknown factors, including Chapter 70 and other state aid. We expect to have ongoing discussions about the school budgets and student transportation service options. The FY13 CPS and CCRSD budgets will be presented at the Concord Public Hearing on February 29, 2012.

The School Committees have heard both parents' and citizens' concerns regarding school budgets and transportation services. We encourage future feedback and urge citizens to attend School Committee meetings, CCHS Building Committee meetings, and Finance Committee meetings, which are all open to the public. Previous School Committee meetings can be viewed via CCTV (www.concordtv.org) and documents are posted on the district web site (www.concordpublicschools.net). If citizens would like to provide email input to the School Committees, you can contact us at cps@colonial.net (Concord School Committee) or cchs@colonial.net (Concord-Carlisle Regional School Committee).

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