

The School Committees Report

The School Committees are dedicated to supporting the school districts' educational goals for Concord, Carlisle and Boston students while maintaining a transparent public process related to policy decisions. This article is one in a series that is intended to update and inform the residents of Concord and Carlisle about the districts' on-going activities, initiatives and policies.

Back to School Nights

The School Committees want to remind families of the upcoming Back to School Nights remaining in September.

Peabody: Thursday, September 24 @ 6:45PM

Thoreau (Grades K-5): Wednesday, September 30 @ 6:30PM

Willard (Grades 3-5): Wednesday, September 30 @ 7:00PM

Building the FY2017 Budget: Special Education

For the School Committees and Administration, building and analyzing the district budgets is a year-round endeavor. One of the most challenging aspects of building the annual operating budget is the Special Education area. Special Education services are mandated by the federal and state governments and these costs comprise approximately 20 percent of the budgets for each district. The cost drivers for the Special Education budget include out of district (OOD) tuitions, transportation services, specialized equipment, as well as district staffing and training.

Tuitions for OOD placements are rising and are based on the specialized need required by special education students. For instance, in FY15, OOD tuitions for the two districts ranged from \$35,000 to \$262,000. The state reimbursement for those services is based upon a formula which uses the per pupil state average foundation budget under the Chapter 70 program. The formula and reimbursements are referred to as Circuit Breakers.

For example, in FY15 if tuition for an OOD placement cost \$50,000, the district's reimbursement from the state for that student would be \$8,056 and the district would pay the remaining \$41,944.

Further complicating this budget challenge is the state's ability to fund the reimbursements. While it is legislatively required to fund the reimbursements at 75 percent above an annually updated threshold amount, historically, when the state finds itself financially challenged, the reimbursements are lower. While the state has met its obligation during the past three fiscal years, the reimbursement rates have ranged from 27.5 percent to 75 percent in the last ten years which requires local districts to have very conservative budget assumptions in order to plan for deficiencies in Circuit Breaker funding.

The Districts have adopted strategies to help control costs and to plan for budgets. This includes communicating with the local pre-schools to help predict the number of students that will require special services who will be entering the system at the kindergarten level. Of course, it is impossible to plan for families that move into the community after a fiscal year's budget has been developed. An example of a cost control strategy is the formation of a collaborative to share costs such as transportation with other local school systems. Each Special Education

student has an Individualized Education Plan and in many cases that plan requires those students to be transported to various settings in order to receive their services. The Concord Area Special Education (CASE) Collaborative provides the special education transportation and allows cost sharing for specialized vehicles and personnel.

The FY16 Special Education budget for CPS is \$7,728,620 which represented a 2.1 percent increase over the previous year. While the Special Education budgets have been volatile during the last decade due to the challenges noted above, the School Committee and Administration are currently planning for a stable budget for FY17 with a very slight decrease in Special Education due to a number of students who access services moving on to the high school.

The Regional School District's FY16 Special Education budget of \$5,569,955 was an increase over the previous year's level of \$5,230,341. The Regional School Committee and Superintendent will be discussing FY17 levels at the end of September.

The School Committees Contact Information

You can link to the School Committees' emails on the Districts' home page at www.concordpublicschools.net. Or, you can email the Concord Public School Committee at concordschoolcommittee@colonial.net and the Concord-Carlisle Regional School Committee at concordcarliseschoolcommittee@colonial.net. You can reach out to the Superintendent and the School Committees through the Your Voice Matters link on the Districts' home page.

School Committee meetings are open to the public and the public is encouraged to attend. The meetings are broadcast on CCTV and are available on demand at www.concordtv.org. The district web site (www.concordpublicschools.net) contains updated reports, presentations and information on meetings.