

JOINT SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Concord-Carlisle School Committee
Concord School Committee
Ripley Conf. Room 4 & Zoom
November 14, 2023

Present: Tracey Marano, Chair, CCSC; CSC
Sharon Whitt, Vice Chair, CCSC (via zoom)
Alexa Anderson, Chair, CSC; CCSC
Carrie Rankin, Vice Chair, CSC; CCSC
Courtland Booth, CSC; CCSC
Cynthia Rainey, CSC, CCSC
Carrie Patel, CCSC (via zoom)

Absent: Ayesha Lawton, CPS METCO Rep
Domingos DaRosa, CCRSD METCO Rep

Present from Administration: Dr. Laurie Hunter, Superintendent of Schools, CPS & CCRSD
Robert Conry, Asst. Supt of Finance & Operations, CPS & CCRSD
Kristen Anderson, Asst. Supt. of Teaching & Learning, CPS & CCRSD (via zoom)

I. CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Marano called the CCSC meeting to order at 5:00 PM and Ms. Anderson then called the CSC meeting to order.

Roll call attendance: A. Anderson, C. Booth, T. Marano, C. Rainey, C. Patel, C. Rankin and S. Whitt - all present.

II. BUDGET WORKSHOP

C. Rankin discussed information surrounding the upcoming second budget workshop. She shared the strategic priorities, as the committee would like to evaluate the way they look at the budget as it is ultimately a value statement, and work towards identifying what the committee hopes to achieve within the next fiscal year's budget. She also explained that B. Conry and his team are finalizing the budget as the 2024 year comes to an end, and the 2025 budget will be finalizing within the next month.

C. Booth requests that the next budget meeting be scheduled, as he would like to ensure there is ample time to discuss the budget. C. Rainey confirmed that this evening they will be discussing values, long term fiscal planning and shelter transportation and on December 5th we will hear the final presentation of the 2025 budget. C. Rainey confirmed that we do not often get a lot of public comment, but it is legally stipulated and she feels that it would not be in the best interest of the committee to schedule the public hearing the same day we hear the 2025 budget. A. Anderson concluded that the SC can schedule another meeting and revisit potentially the community forum.

A. Strategic Priorities

1. Administrative/Strategic Plan

C. Rankin opened the conversation with a question about the values people hope to see reflected in this year's budget. A. Anderson asked the Administration how they will achieve the goals outlined in the new strategic plan without raising the budget. A. Anderson confirmed that the SC has a lot of fiscal goals. She noted that due to the tight fiscal climate, she would like to know how to achieve the goals realistically and what the 5 year plan looks like without increasing the budget.

Dr. Hunter confirmed that the Zero Base Process accounts for the evolving reviewing of budget every year, including items where process is to be made, and areas where budget is no longer relevant (i.e one time costs, shifts in

enrollment)and ultimately the base process is iterative. Dr. Hunter continued to note that reductions are part of the process, and when items from the previous budget plan have been met, the fiscal values and fiscal plans all evolve to the next project. A. Anderson requested a slide to be shown each year that clearly states the offset of the budget and C. Booth confirmed that the slides in question have historically been drivers and the information is visible there.

C. Booth stated that at the early stage of the budget priorities should be student facing involvement, as student enrollment and student needs drive personnel costs and personnel costs are historically 3 quarters of the budget, if not more. C. Rankin confirmed agreement. Dr. Hunter confirmed that the guideline from the budget is never enough to offset staff increases off of the contracts, and this why the goal of zero process is so fluid.

T. Marano spoke about the MCAS studies, and reports that will indicate that curriculum needs should be discussed within the budget conversation. A. Anderson noted that upon seeing the drivers within the budget plan, it would be appropriate for the SC and the public to see how each budget demonstrates how it is connected to the plan explicitly. Dr. Hunter agreed that within the strategic plan, this would be a great addition.

C. Rainey noted that other districts do an Annual Progress report, and she believes that the Concord Carlisle School District does have a policy in place for the report to be completed each year, and would like to see the report completed. She suggested it be added to the June meeting.

T. Marano confirmed the plans and goals are readily available to the public on our website and Dr. Hunter confirmed that the Concord Schools website is being re-developed and she would ensure the strategy would be readily available to the public.

T. Marano requested an update on mental health, as to what we are spending, what we have spent and continue to make the proper investments that are paramount to our students.

2. School Committee/School Committee Goals

B. Long term Fiscal Planning

Dr. Hunter noted that the long term fiscal plan is regionally focused, as there are moving pieces to the region that are not part of the CPS budget. She asked the SC for their input on the package budget.

B. Conry stated that it would be nice to ensure some funding on hand, while looking into the debt service and the long term all of the borrowings and the principal due from the access road- for the region. Total debt service cost and the decrease vs the prior year, and moving forward these reductions in the budget were significant year over year. If the amenities warrant passes, it would be added to the interest and reductions. Potential savings which could be added to capital savings- In year one it could add 50%, which for example: with 20% of \$120k, that is \$60k that could potentially be added to the budget. He suggested an assessment on the CCHS, fixed costs, debt service etc.

B. Conry stated that if the Amenities bill passes, likely in 2026 it would be interest free, but overtime the reductions from this project could go from \$3.9 million to \$2.5 million and that's \$1.4 million by year in the reductions category. He continued to discuss that this presents an opportunity to discuss budget cuts, and add savings towards capital stabilization; in year one it could add 50%, which for example: with 20% of \$120k, that is \$60k that could potentially be added to the budget for the following year. Currently, Mr. Conry notes that, the total debt service is \$3,000,946 and the next year it drops to \$3,000,824 and the decrease year to year is a \$122,00_savings from declining debt services. C. Rainey noted that she strongly disagrees that the reduction is savings, where C. Booth agreed and stated that with less than 10k in the savings, he suggests another column added to the fiscal spreadsheet. Dr. Hunter confirmed that this is what she and Mr. Conry are asking the committee for input on what to do about fiscal reductions.

B. Conry confirmed that feedback is needed for the level of funds to be allocated into capital stabilization for long-term obligations, and what level are the needs currently or down the road. He continued to say that theoretically if we did allocate funds to capital stabilization and the Amenities building was presented 10 years from now, the funds would be readily available and we would not need to ask the town for funding. A. Anderson confirmed that after the base budget is presented, then the SC can additionally discuss these questions over the next few meetings.

The next item Mr. Conry discussed was the OPEB (Post employment benefits) obligation, which has had positive investment results and as previously reported in the year end reporting the district is making an aggressive contribution of \$550,000 per year and believes that this aggressiveness will be an asset to the district down the road. He also

explained that upon discovery of some employers where the benefits are paid by the Town of Concord, no longer needs to be allocated in our plan. OPEB audits are conducted every 2 years, and that report will show the changes and projections of the district.

Dr. Hunter confirmed that the goal of tonight was to showcase the SC the many moving pieces where the SC has the opportunity to talk about it and have open discussions on allocation, goals, and strategic plans.

C. Shelter Transportation

B. Conry shared a student transportation update on the homeless student population within his detailed slide presentation. Specifically, Concord expended funds for the remainder of the year for students traveling to their school of origin. Additionally, pilot money coming in November 2023 will offset some of the outflow from the intended budget and C. Booth asked that the offset state funding be added to the fiscal presentation.

B. Conry noted that budget workshops will be added in December, and the Capital Plan hearing is scheduled for December 19, 2023. C. Booth asked if discussion on the public comment will be available before the hearing, and Dr. Hunter confirmed in the past the public comment was during the scheduled hearing.

III. Adjournment CCRSC

T. Marano adjourned the CCRSC meeting at 5:46 pm CSC to remain in session.

Concord School Committee to remain in session.

T. Marano requested that the SC vote on Action Item B, the Washington DC trip prior to public comment.

Dr. Hunter provided information about the annual 8th grade trip to Washington DC; Monday June 3- Friday June 7th, the cost is \$1,417 per student which includes airfare, hotel and additional transportation. She noted that Mr. Cameron has a goal that each student raises \$300 through various fundraising efforts.

A. Anderson motions to approve the 8th Grade Washington DC trip, C. Rainey seconds, all in favor aye.

I. Public Comment (20 minutes)

T. Marano noted that the public comment section of the meeting is limited to 20 minutes. If any one person was unable to speak during the meeting whether in person, or connected via zoom then she recommended that they either attend the next meeting or send in email correspondence to voice their concerns, suggestions etc.

Joel Lauren, 134 South Hill Road

Strongly urges the SC to not consider a change for the Concord Middle School.

Mark Martinez, 66 Alfred Circle

Encourages SC to not entertain a vote to change the name of the Concord Middle School

Nikki Turpin, President of Robins House

Requested that the committee allow the town's residents to have a choice on the Concord Middle Schools name.

Ellen Quakenbush - zoom

Strongly supports the name change of the Concord Middle School to be named after Ellen Garrison.

Joe Palumbo

Stated that the Concord Middle School is on town property, and therefore a public hearing should be held for the town's constituents to have their voices heard, prior to sending name options to the Board of Select Board.

Pat Brewer, 132 Wright Rd

Referenced an email dated November 9th, from the Chair of the Select Board that states that APP43 indicates that any request for naming a public property, shall be considered at a public hearing.

Margaret Schumacher, 25 Highland St.

Would like to celebrate the town's upcoming 250 Anniversary and also supports the public to have an open public hearing on the name of the Concord Middle School.

Elizabeth Frank, 1283 Elm St

States that the renaming of the Concord Middle School seems to be such a diverse topic, and suggest leaving the School named 'The Concord Middle School' and naming a separate building the Ellen Garrison Building.

Kim Frederick, 166 Main St.

Thanks the SC for all the work they do, and asks for the SC to entertain a conversation with the public/town on the name/renaming of the Concord Middle School.

Elizabeth Cobbs, 31 Pondview Lane

Recognized the upcoming town Anniversary, and also stated that although there are apparent 2 sides that do not agree, it is still relevant to discuss community dialog and have a public hearing on the name of the Concord Middle School.

II. Discussion

A. Anderson shares that over the last five days, she and Dr. Hunter have been meeting together to discuss what? She read a statement "The Superintendent and I have spent an extraordinary amount of time the last 5 days, ensuring that all of our eyes are dotted and our T's are crossed as we embark on this important task of whether to rename the Concord Middle School. We have the school committee lawyer review, and we asked her for a formal legal analysis of our situation and the school committee has seen her legal analysis, and I'll speak to some of it here as well, but I first wanted to start up with some history. So for those of you who attended our last meeting last week, you'll know there was a bit of confusion about the policy, and its name. The name of our Policy is the Facilities Naming Policy. She stated that the district school districts in the state have policy FF, our SC noted in last week's meeting, that the SC was uncertain as to whether Concord Public School had a policy at all, because in the policy handbook the policy mentions only the Concord Carlisle Regional High School". Because of this uncertainty, she and Dr. Hunter examined the minutes from September 20, 2015 when the policy was adopted and found that both the region and Concord Public school voted on policy FF. However, something still didn't sit right with A. Anderson as most of all the agendas are available for the public, and when she went to click on policy FF, it was a dead end and because of that she was unable to identify what the SC in 2015 voted on. A. Anderson asked Dr. Hunter referenced the paper archive, and there she was able to see that the policy was discussed several times in 2015, however the minutes from those meetings were never actually approved, therefore there are no public records of those meetings. Upon further investigation, they were able to find the document what policy was read to the SC, but no vote was recorded. A. Anderson later spoke with a 2015 SC member, Wally Johnson who was referenced in the minutes noted above, however he had no recollection of the policy. The key take away from the FF policy, is that the SC does defer to policy App43, the unapproved draft minutes from the Facility SubCommittee meeting, recommended a regional policy for FF, and it did differ from what they recommended for CPS. Dr. Hunter added that there were regional decisions to be made, and A. Anderson confirmed that the facilities naming committee did recommend the adoption of policy App43. A. Anderson stated that she wanted the public to know that the SC assumes this was an oversight from the previous superintendent administrative assistant, and that there was no malicious intent.

To summarize, A Policy made by a School Board is aligned with Mass General Law- chapter 7168 (The authority to name school buildings is within the School Committee). Secondly, within legal hierarchy, the Charter of the Town of Concord is in alignment with Mass General Law, and it does give authority to name schools specifically with the School Committee. The next legal authority of this, are the bylaws adopted by the legislative body, and there are none in the case. The final step in the hierarchy are the policies adopted by the town boards, i.e the Town Select and the School Committee. A. Anderson concludes this summary, acknowledging that there is a policy that contradicts Mass General Law, Town charter and MASC, noting there are no other committees in the State of Massachusetts that delegates their authority and adopted the FF policy; however one community renamed their FF policy as a dedicated policy as they decided that naming buildings after people was inappropriate. She asked the SC for their input on how to move forward.

C. Booth notes that he believes the SC has heard sensible arguments for not tying up the Town on this issue, however he sees A. Anderson efforts clearly as tying up the SC. He continued to reference how A. Anderson independently went to the school attorney, and not to the Town Council as previously agreed, and spent so many days of extraordinary effort with the superintendent. He referenced Ap43, that is unambiguous, and the Chair of Board confirmed his feelings that it was unambiguous as well as the SC naming policy is a regional policy, and it has stood for years unchallenged and uncontested. He referenced 2 camps which have emerged in efforts of pursuing public opinion on their standings of the Middle Schools name, and predicts additional camps may and will come forward, furthering division and confirming arguments for a public process. C. Booth strongly believes that if a subgroup finds that their suggestions are not approved, they will feel heard if they were given the opportunity to speak for themselves. C. Booth confirmed that moving forward, the public should be involved.

A. Anderson confirmed that the vote on this topic was removed, as the SC does not have an authority to presently decide. She continued and asked the SC what their opinions are.

1- Does the SC continue with a policy that contradicts Town Charter and Mass General Law, and MASC recommended policy, in which case the result of that would be adhering to APP43.

2- Revisit the SC policy to ensure that it is in alignment with all legal authority, while starting with the MASC that advocates for the public hearing process.

C. Rainey asked Town Council opinion on this, and C. Rankin asked why the SC would need that. C. Rainey responded that the SC is a town department of Concord. Dr. Hunter noted that the SC does not have direct access to that request, and would have to through the select board in town. C. Rainey confirmed there is a policy that states we can access town councils policy (VDG) and A. Anderson stated she discussed that option with the SC Attorney, and it was not recommended. A. Anderson continued to discuss that she feels it is disrespectful to the SC Attorney to get other legal opinions.

C. Booth stated that two members of the SC (C. Booth and A. Anderson) supported engaging in attorney, A. Anderson confirmed that as chair that is her prerogative. C. Booth confirmed that he is not concerned with hurting the tender feelings of the SC Attorney, and believes getting other legal opinions is something that has to be thoroughly contested.

T. Marano noted that referencing tender feelings to an Attorney is completely inappropriate, and that with the SC having an Attorney that they pay for, it is prerogative for the chair to go, as A. Anderson did. She further stated that if the SC seeks another opinion, that is going to be funded by town resources. She confirmed that she is confident with the SC Attorney, and if there is an issue with the school attorney, then that is another question.

A. Anderson noted that one of her biggest objectives as chair is to ensure that the SC is doing everything according to best practice within the boundaries of the law, as the SC is representing a lot of constituents. C. Rankin stated that she is surprised with the contention within the SC, as she hears that all members want one process that can be agreed upon, and with the uncertainty of the process as it stands right now, she worries that if the SC is unable to agree on *how* to get a name for the middle school, how will the conversations go when discussing *what* the name should be. She stated that she believes we should follow MASC guidance, where there is a public process followed by a vote.

C. Rainey asks what the timeline would be for reviewing the MASC recommended version, and A. Anderson stated that she would recommend two Concord meetings that could be added to the two scheduled meetings in December, and from there if a new policy is adopted the SC would move to follow the policy which would move to a public discussion, and believes that could happen after Christmas break.

T. Marano asked if we could vote on December 19th, and A. Anderson stated that the SC could allocate time in the month of December, and believes this should be a priority for the community. C. Rainey stated that one meeting hearing is inappropriate, and believes that there should be a broader process and A. Anderson confirmed that we would adopt the policy of the MASC recommendations.

General consensus about adding this topic to the previously scheduled December meetings (December 5th, and December 19th), agreed amongst SC members.

T. Marano adjourned the meeting at 7:00PM

Approved: 1.9.24