



BUDGET COMMITTEE
Town of Hollis
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Minutes of 18 October 2010

Meeting was held in the Hollis/Brookline Cooperative Middle School in the multipurpose room. The Budget Committee was called to order by Chris Hyde, Chairman at 7:10 PM.

Members present: Chris Hyde, Chairman; Mike Harris, Vice-Chair, Tom Gehan, Susan Benz, Ray Valle.

Also present: Susan Hodgdon, Superintendent; Jeanne Saunders, Director of Special Education; Marcy Kelley, Assistant Director of Special Education.

The School Board provided a handout 'Overview of the Hollis Special Education Budget', attached.

Chris Hyde noted that the meeting is a special meeting and said that the regularly scheduled meeting will be next Tuesday, 26 October 2010 at which the budget guidance will be set. Chris mentioned that the purpose of the meeting is to explore more deeply the special education program and budget information, which is ~20% of the school budget.

Jeanne Saunders provided an overview of the special education process. She described the sources of referral and mentioned that the school district is responsible for educating children with special needs between the ages of 3 and 21. She reviewed the types of activities during referral and evaluation that may incur added cost such as outside evaluations of various types. Jeanne noted that ~90% of the special education budget is derived directly through analysis of the cost associated with delivering the services required by the IEP, other parts of the budget are associated with special evaluations of various types that individuals students may require. Chris questioned whether there is a conflict of interest when a contracted evaluator is also the provider of the service. Jeanne said that that can be the case and that the TEAM needs to evaluate the recommendation and make a decision based on the child's need rather than the provider's pay check. Chris asked whether it is possible to audit the results of the evaluator's recommendation. Susan Hodgdon mentioned that the in-district staff provides the 'check' in the process. Susan said that one of the changes that has happened over the last three years is the IEP audit process and assessing the effectiveness of the IEP, i.e. is the child achieving the desired progress or should some services be changed, dropped or added. Chris asked whether it is possible to 'bid-out' the contracts for the special services. Jeanne mentioned that individual contractor agreements have been developed. She has informally looked at rates and she feels that we have pretty favorable contractor rates as well as high quality providers. Jeanne mentioned that she and Marcy are fundamentally revamping the extended school year program. She noted that the lack of a coherent overall plan for the extended school year program has caused excessive labor and transportation costs. She also mentioned that she and Marcy are working on a criterion to assist the TEAM in deciding whether an individual special education aide is required. Jeanne mentioned that the Department of Education looks to see that the child is in the classroom 80% of their day. Chris asked if there is a consequence if the goal is not met. Jeanne said that there is not.

Ray Valle asked whether there is a means by which parents can provide feedback. Jeanne said that she has solicited feedback from parents at meetings of parents and that she has received quite a bit of feedback but that she is sure there are others who may not share an issue that their child may be having. Susan said that the SAU leadership team is working hard to create a culture of openness and transparency.

Budget Committee Minutes 18 October 2010

Chris noted that while the student population is declining, the percentage of children identified as requiring special education services has been increasing. Jeanne noted that while the numbers of children in the school age population is decreasing there appears to be a bit of a bubble in the pre-school population in which more parents of pre-school are referring their children. Ray asked whether, of the children being diagnosed with autism or Asberger's syndrome, there are many who are included in that category that may not have been in years past when the diagnostic category was more narrow. Jeanne said that a large number of the children in that category are in the high function type of autism or with a mild form of the condition.

Chris asked about potential savings in the out of district transportation. Marcy Kelley mentioned that there are possibilities to save in that area such as sharing with another district. Jeanne mentioned that they selected a contractor with lower rates but with good service.

Marcy pointed out that the number of identified students is declining. Chris asked whether there is a corresponding possibility to reduce staff. Jeanne said that conversations along those lines are being had. Tom Gehan pointed out that the number of students is about 95. In the past with that number of students there were 22 staff today there are 54. He asked whether there are reasons for the difference.

Jeanne reviewed the process she uses to develop the budget. She also described a class of expenses that are unanticipated and discussed revenue sources. Marcy reviewed potential FY11 savings. Marcy also commented that there are potentially some in-district students who may be eligible for catastrophic aid from the state. She mentioned that it might be a good idea to set a tuition rate for some 'approved' programs to aid in that determination.

Motion to adjourn was made by Mike Harris and seconded by Susan Benz. Meeting adjourned: 9:52p.m.

The next meeting will be on Tuesday, 26 October 2010, in the Town Hall Community room at 7:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Michael Harris