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Budget Minutes 6/17/2009

Budget Subcommittee of the Arlington School Committee

Minutes for June 17, 2009, 5:00 p.m., School Committee Room

APPROVED July 27, 2009

Attendees

Committee Members Joseph A. Curro, Jr., Chair
Cindy Starks
Ronald Spangler (Joined at 5:12 p.m.)

Administration Interim Supt. Kathleen Bodie (Joined at 5:57 p.m.)
Susan Mazzarella, Chief Financial Officer

Others Richard Fanning, Finance Committee
Mary Ronan, Finance Committee
Juli Brazile
Mary Cummings

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 5:07 p.m.

Public Participation

The chair invited public participation. No members of the public wished to share any matters of concern during this portion of the meeting.

Budget Priorities

Dr. Spangler entered the meeting.

Per the chair's previous requests, Ms. Mazzarella shared with the committee a consolidated list of prioritized reductions drawn from previous Tier 3 and 4 proposals.

The list shared by Ms. Mazzarella included some changes from previous Tier 3 and 4 lists, among them:

- An increase of stipends from \$15,000 to \$18,500.
- A reduction of proposed athletics cuts from \$50,000 to \$10,000.
- A reduction of teacher aides
- An offset to account for the implementation of energy-saving measures around computing resources.

Dr. Spangler stated his view that the Budget Subcommittee should be looking at the athletic budget to ensure that we

continue to provide students with a breadth of opportunities in the most cost-effective manner possible.

Mr. Curro expressed concerns that proposed TA cuts would reverse the effect of amendments to the budget made by the full School Committee.

Ms. Starks questioned the effect of potential Fine Arts administrative cuts that have recently come to light and whether the School Committee would get to vote on these.

Mr. Curro asked that the proposed cut list call out any changes from previous iterations viewed by the School Committee. Ms. Starks recommended that the list include a running total, making it easier to see the effects of any particular magnitude of cuts.

Dr. Spangler said that it was difficult to look at the proposed list without knowing final state numbers. Ms. Mazzarella stated that more precise numbers were not available from the state.

There was a discussion as to whether the Budget Subcommittee should be engaging in specific recommendations of priorities or should be merely recommending a process for consideration by the entire School Committee. Mr. Fanning suggested that the subcommittee should operate in the latter fashion. Dr. Spangler expressed concern that this would be outside of the subcommittee's charter.

Mrs. Ronan raised questions regarding the issuance of pink slips, and Mr. Curro and Ms. Starks explained the vote of the full School Committee regarding this matter.

Ms. Mazzarella explained that specific positions targeted for elimination represented a consensus of the administration.

Dr. Spangler moved to recommend to the Interim Superintendent and School Committee chair that further action on reductions be postponed, pending a new budget number from the Town. Ms. Starks seconded the motion for discussion.

Mr. Fanning raised concerns that the School Department would need to be prepared to implement any plan in September.

Dr. Spangler withdrew his motion.

Dr. Spangler then moved to recommend an agenda item to the School Committee Chair and Interim Superintendent of Schools to review and vote on Tier 3 and 4 priorities, but not to approve actual cuts. The motion was seconded by Ms. Starks and unanimously approved.

Dr. Bodie entered the meeting.

Fiscal Year 2011 Planning

Dr. Bodie stated that there might be a need to undertake planning for Fiscal Year 2011 with two budgets: one assuming an override and one assuming none.

Dr. Bodie referenced the legislative conference committee report -- slated to be released on Friday -- and the great speculation around what this will contain.

The subcommittee discussed some of the many variables that must be considered in FY11 budget planning: stimulus money; possibility of Group Insurance Commission participation by employees; state aid; local option taxes; employee contracts; state and federal grants. (Ms. Mazzarella stated that the District has been notified of an 11-12% cut in kindergarten grants for the upcoming year.)

There was consensus that the subcommittee should perform some deep dives around these and other questions.

In discussing a calendar for budget planning milestones, Dr. Spangler recommended that the schedule for community and public participation be considered on a parallel track with milestones for administrative and School Committee action.

There was also some discussion of how the Budget Subcommittee might play a role in shaping and forwarding any

agenda for reconfiguration and restructuring. Dr. Bodie felt that the subcommittee should take up questions of wholesale change and stated the belief that large changes will be necessary in the face of what promises to be a very difficult FY11 and beyond.

Dr. Bodie stated that the administrative cabinet would be meeting over the summer and starting the process of brainstorming ideas. The interim superintendent did raise the question of what effect certain restructuring moves might have on the renovation plans for Thompson Elementary School.

There was brief discussion of the list of unfunded and underfunded mandates on local school districts that was compiled by the Massachusetts Association of School Committees.

Next Meeting

The subcommittee determined to next meet on July 1 at 5 p.m. in the School Committee room. *(Chairman's note: Since this decision, the date and time of the next meeting have come into doubt.)*

Adjournment

On motion of Ms. Starks, seconded by Dr. Spangler, the meeting was adjourned at 6:31 p.m.