

FAIRBANKS NORTH STAR BOROUGH SCHOOL DISTRICT
BOARD OF EDUCATION
FAIRBANKS, ALASKA

Work Session

MINUTES

March 7, 2016

President Haas called the work session to order at 6:23 p.m. in the board room of the FNSBSD Administrative Center at 520 Fifth Avenue. The work session was called for board discussion and work on the 2016-17 budget, including presentation of the Citizen Budget Review Committee (CBRC) report.

President Haas read the district's mission statement: *"Our mission is to provide an excellent, equitable education in a safe, supportive environment so all students will succeed and contribute to a diverse and changing society."*

Present:

Heidi Haas, President
Lisa Gentry, Vice President
Allyson Lambert, Treasurer
Michael O'Brien, Clerk
Wendy Dominique, Member
Sue Hull, Member (By Phone)

Absent:

Sean Rice, Member

Staff Present:

Dr. Karen Gaborik, Superintendent of Schools
Lisa Pearce, Chief Financial Officer
Sandra Kowalski, Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Education
Traci Gatewood, Executive Director of Human Resources
Kathie Wassmann, Executive Director of Special Education
Dave Norum, Executive Director of Facilities Maintenance
Janet Cobb, Executive Director of Technology
Melanie Hadaway, Executive Director of Curriculum & Instruction
Sharice Walker, Director of Public Relations
Helen Clark, Director of Federal Programs
Holly Cervin, Director of Alternative Education
Heather Rauenhorst, Director of Grants and Strategic Partnerships
Dan Domke, Director of Career Technical Education
Sharon Tuttle, Executive Assistant to the Board

Citizen Budget Review Committee Members:

Christopher Dean
Becky Williams
Tammy Dauma

Citizen Budget Review Committee Report [0:00:36]

Christopher Dean, Citizen Budget Review Committee (CBRC) member, presented the committee's report, assisted by committee member Becky Williams.

The CBRC strongly supported the ongoing efforts of the board and administration to maintain class size, as it impacted the majority of students and lent to greater achievement. The committee's number one priority was to maintain or improve class sizes, especially in the lower grade levels (1-4). The committee recommended the board consider increasing class size targets at certain higher grade levels in order to find the funds necessary to lower the class size targets in grades 1-4, ultimately resulting in a "net zero dollar impact" to the total budget.

Citizen Budget Review Committee Report (continued)

Other recommendations included (in no particular order):

- Increase support for underperforming students at non-Title I schools.
- Empower school principals to allocate their staff to best fit the needs of their local school community.
- Restructure the special education department in order to provide one full-time extended learning program (ELP) teacher to each elementary school. The ELP was part of the special education department and had not had an increase in years.
- Continue to support student enrichment through art, music, and activities.

In the event of decreased funding, the committee proposed the following budget changes:

- Decrease the proposed budgets by 2.5% in the following department:
 - Technology
- Decrease the proposed budgets by 5% in the following departments:
 - Administrative Services
 - Human Resources
 - Special Education, through restructuring
 - Instruction and Supervision
- Decrease the proposed budgets by 10% in the following departments:
 - Board of Education
 - Travel
- Increase efficiencies throughout the district. For example,
 - renegotiate officiating contracts
 - renegotiate ice contracts/facility agreements
 - manage overtime expenses-look for more efficient work schedule structure

Sustaining a variety of educational programs was also of serious concern to the committee.

The FY16-17 proposed budget included a status quo local contribution amount of \$55.3 million. The committee did not believe the contribution was an unreasonable expectation, as the borough assembly had historically been very supportive of the district. It remained to be seen what financial impact the crisis facing the state would have on local communities, but the committee suggested the district, once again this year, request the assembly waive the \$800,000 annual lapsing of fund balance in support of the district's operating budget for fiscal year 2016-17.

As recommended last year, the committee again recommended district administration continue to work with the borough to amend code language that would permanently address the lapse of school district funds. While the committee appreciated the assembly's commitment to maintain school facilities, current language ultimately reduced critical operational dollars in the classroom and did not take into account unique situations regarding categorical funding and foundation funding offsets. The committee believed current language discouraged prudent saving of year-end funds and the re-allocation of those funds in support of classrooms in the next budget year.

Depending upon what happened at the state level, the committee may further recommend the board request additional local contribution amounts from the assembly in order to avoid significant degradation to the local community educational program. The committee understood there was room, conceivably in the foundation formula, for the local community to contribute close to an additional \$9 million more towards education, before hitting the 100% threshold of the formula. The committee also understood other local governments already contributed 100% of what was allowed by the foundation formula.

Citizen Budget Review Committee Report (continued)

Board Questions & Comments

Board discussion ensued. Item for discussion only; no action required. Board members questioned the committee's recommendations to grow special education with ELP teachers, while also recommending a 5 percent reduction. Committee members thought the special education department could restructure its operations to reduce its overall budget and still provide extended learning teachers at each school. There was also a question if the committee had considered any reductions to the BEST program. The committee considered the BEST program as part of the strategic plan and a method to increase revenue and hence did not recommend any reductions.

Board discussions continued with questions about decreasing elementary class sizes while increasing high school class sizes. Committee members explained high school principals had stated there was some room for increases at the high school level. Board members also had questions about how the percentage of reductions to certain departments was determined. The committee had considered previous reductions in making their decisions.

Board members thanked Mr. Dean and Ms. Williams for the report and the entire CBRC committee for its work. They asked about the current year's budget process versus previous year's processes. Both Mr. Dean and Ms. Williams thought the new process was great. It provided the committee with the opportunity to see what the administration was looking at and working on. They thought the process allowed for more and better feedback.

A board member request was made for information on the success rate for BEST students.

2016-17 Budget Work [0:18:56]

Superintendent Dr. Gaborik explained she had removed the "elimination of the Alaska Room" from the level 3 reductions presented at the last budget work session. She was interested in leveraging community resources to maintain the program. Since the last meeting, there had been some great ideas proposed about moving forward.

Class Size Research Summary [0:20:09]

Melanie Hadaway, executive director of curriculum, and Heather Rauenhorst, director of grants and strategic partnerships, presented and reviewed the Class Size Research (CSR) Summary. The report included assumptions about class size reductions; a summary of findings; evidence-based alternatives to CSR; and recommendations.

Class size was not a one size fit all situation. Well-prepared teachers could have as much effect on student success as class size. Small classes in the primary grades offered particular academic and behavioral advantages to minority and low-income students whose gains increased the longer they were exposed to smaller classes. Academic gains from small classes in the primary grades were larger when class size was reduced to fewer than 15 students. The greatest effects recorded were for class size reductions of 7-8 students per class.

Recommendations

It was recommended the efficacy of a class-size reduction be weighed against other potential use of funds. Lower class size may or may not prove the more cost-effective policy overall. If possible, class size reduction should be targeted toward the populations for which it was known to work best. The academic effects seemed to be largest when introduced in the earliest grades, and for students from less advantaged family backgrounds. Gains may also be largest in classrooms of teachers who are less well-prepared and effective in the classroom.

- Prioritize smaller class sizes for the populations that have been shown to reap the most benefits: early grades and low-income minority students.
- Focus CSR on low-achieving schools.
- Allow class size flexibility to accommodate the different needs of each school so that class size is lower for low income students and higher for more affluent students.
- Allow smaller classes for beginning teachers and larger classes for experienced teachers.
- Focus on establishing smaller classes in kindergarten and first grade.

2016-17 Budget Work (continued)

Board Questions & Comments

Board discussion ensued. Item for discussion only; no action required. Board members asked about research specific to Alaska classrooms, the effect of lower class sizes for lower-performing students, increased class sizes at the upper grades versus the lower grades, the costs of different class size scenarios, and class size comparisons between the Big 5 districts.

A board member requested class size comparison information for the Big 5 for the current year.

Human Resources (HR) Staffing Comparison Chart [0:37:57]

Traci Gatewood, executive director of human resources, reviewed the HR staffing comparison chart. The comparison encompassed different entities, including the Big 5 school districts, UAF, Fairbanks Memorial Hospital, Kinross Ft. Knox Gold Mine, and Doyon Limited. The district's HR staffing was not unreasonable in comparison to other like school districts.

Board Questions & Comments

Board discussion ensued. Item for discussion only; no action required. Board members appreciated the comparison information; they thought it was valuable.

Board Comments/Announcements [0:47:28]

President Haas announced the upcoming Budget Public Hearing and Work Session scheduled for Wednesday, March 9, beginning at 6:00 p.m. On behalf of the entire board, President Haas again thanked the CBRC committee for their work and recommendations.

The meeting adjourned at 7:13 p.m.

Submitted by Sharon Tuttle, executive assistant to the Board of Education.