

Warrant Committee Education Subcommittee
January 5, 2023 7:30 PM
Town Hall, Conference Room 1

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DATE: February 15, 2023
TIME: 2:35 PM

Meeting Minutes

Members in Attendance

Bill Anderson, Anne Helgen, Paul Rickter, Laurie Slap, Matt Taylor, Jack Weis

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:36 PM

Discussion of FY 24 School Department Budget

The meeting began with a discussion of the FY 24 School Department budget presented at the January 3rd School Committee meeting. (Most Ed Subcommittee members had been able to listen in on this meeting.) Jack urged the subcommittee to try and focus on the big picture concepts and assumptions from that meeting rather than digging into the details.

A wide-ranging and unstructured discussion followed. Key conclusions drawn from the discussion included:

- Most subcommittee members agreed that, with one or two possible exceptions, the expenses in the FY 24 School Department budget represented a reasonable attempt by the School Department to develop a “reasonable level services” budget.
- The \$2.7 million increase in the budget attributable to simply rolling forward the salaries of the current staff represents more than the available additional revenue that the Town Administrator’s office has projected for not just the School Department, but for all town departments. Moreover, as the materials presented by the School Department point out, about \$475,000 of that rollover salary increase is attributable to the School Department adding 6.59 of additional unbudgeted FTEs in FY 23.
- The department is projecting an increase of approximately \$2.0 attributable to the reconfiguration resulting from the opening of the new upper middle school (Grades 7 & 8). Subcommittee members were not persuaded that all 20.32 FTE positions that the department is suggesting are required to open the new school are truly needed as part of maintaining level service.
- The staffing estimates do not appear to include any allowance for staff exchange savings (i.e., the customary trend that higher-paid staff retire or otherwise depart and that they are replaced by lower-paid staff). Last year, approximately \$400,000-\$500,000 of staff exchange savings were included in the FY 23 budget.
- The department is projecting a \$9.1 million budget for out-of-district (OOD) special education tuition expenses. However, that amount includes \$1.5 million to replenish the carry-forward OOD reserves expected to be drawn down in FY 23.
- There are likely other areas that the department can and should consider to reduce the projected FY 24 budget increase, including possibly reducing the budget for texts, supplies and materials (given that the FY 22 turnback in those line items, excluding the rental of tents for COVID-related distancing, was approximately \$425,000) and increasing user fees (which, while high, have seemingly not been increased in the 10 years since they were initially adopted).

- Bottom line, the subcommittee believes that there is no way that the town can afford to increase the School Department budget by the \$9.4 million included in the initial budget that the School Department administration presented to the School Committee at the January 3rd School Committee meeting.

Jack will provide a high-level summary of the subcommittee's big-picture conclusions when we meet with the administration and School Committee members at the January 6th meeting.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30 PM.