

Communications/Curriculum Meeting
April 3, 2017

Present: Deirdre d'Albertis, Laura Schulkind, Marvin Kreps, Joe Phelan, Steve Jensen, Deirdre Burns and Tom Burnell joined the meeting for about 20 minutes to clarify budget numbers.

[BOE members are the same in both committees, combined meeting in light of budget challenges.]

The board has received a few letters from the community about proposed budget cuts. Questions raised are we "right sized." A couple of letters support exceeding tax cap to avoid cuts, others do not support exceeding the cap, but also do not want cuts. Deirdre B. raised a concern that community members have misconceptions about work titles - "typist" is a civil service classification. Also, the work of admins is little understood by the community. The workload has been ramped up by state reporting requirements and APPR. Are there ways we can communicate better the importance of the work of all of our staff? Deirdre d'A pointed out that we value all members of our community - suggestions that certain positions are without value are not representative of how we have developed a vibrant school community in Rhinebeck.

It was noted, however, that declining enrollment will surely impact staff over time. We need to have a plan for how to make the best use of staff. And each district is unique, there may be no "right size." Mindful planning will be driven by priorities in this district. Our community wants to maintain excellent schools and the tax cap is a political reality we must deal with. Laura noted the growth in percentage of students eligible for free and reduced lunch.

Joe and his staff continue to look at possible cuts to the budget, including eliminating costs related to MAPS testing. With no state budget, we can't estimate any possible increase in state aid - another challenge in settling on our own budget.

The committee discussed the consequences of not filling a middle school ELA position that is open due to a retirement. Can current staff be deployed to fill that position? If a K-6 certified teacher were to move into that position, one fewer class at CLS would result in larger class size. Certification and seniority issues complicate any easy solution here. It was also noted that other cuts that seem "easy" have consequences: professional development matters.

The committee discussed that the problem of maintaining excellent programming in the context of a tax cap/ declining enrollment is not going away. Decision-making can become acrimonious in this kind of environment. We should be alert to interpersonal and morale consequences. There is tension between seeing this as an opportunity to expand educational offerings - more non-traditional programs/courses - or choosing to reduce staff for "right size efficiencies." What is the right size given the high expectations of our community? Workforce reductions always have implications. We have built a robust educational program as a response to the clamoring in the community for high quality offerings. Investments have been made in various areas with community support. Mission, Vision and Core Values have been thoughtfully revised to reflect our comprehensive, student-centered goals. We are in the business of knowledge- and citizen-making. Education is a human enterprise, and, as such, is always inefficient.

Final thoughts:

- Joe will continue to refine budget and board will discuss at Tuesday, 4/4 meeting
- Tax cap will continue to put pressure on our district and all districts - it is not a sustainable funding mechanism.
- Board workshop devoted to curricular planning, as has been suggested previously, is necessary.

Submitted by Deirdre Burns