

Finance Committee Meeting
April 28, 2016
Minutes

Present: Mark Fleischhauer, Deirdre d'Albertis, Deirdre Burns, Joe Phelan, Tom Burnell

1. Credit Card Policy.

The committee reviewed a draft from Tom. Some modifications were suggested. The draft will now go to the policy committee.

2. Budget Transfers

The Board will be asked to approve budget transfers at its next meeting, May 10. The committee reviewed the transfers and explanations for each. A discussion ensued about increases related to class coverage. Coverage is more costly when teachers, not subs, cover a class. Tom and Joe explained the process for teachers to get subs. For various reasons it can be difficult to get subs (we only use certified teachers as subs, subs who do not routinely get work may move on to other opportunities). However, we should encourage teachers to plan ahead in getting subs when they know they will be needed, as getting subs last minute is particularly hard. The committee discussed including notification about a teachers' responsibility to line up a sub when they are given permission for conferences or other absences. Mark asked if we are paying subs competitively compared to other districts. Tom and Joe will have to get us that information. Joe will give consideration to how to educate the staff about the best way to handle absences so as not to see continued growth in this budget line. Increases in home tutoring costs are largely related to students with medical issues.

3. Long range budget planning.

Tom has reviewed a model for 5 year financial planning. He has played with some of the fields, the granularity is good but would need to create different categories to be useful for our district (for example, BOCES costs). Questions were raised by the committee about the assumptions made when projecting a budget years in the future (cost increases, revenues). Are the assumptions essentially speculation? Discussion ensued about the value of predicting future tax levy caps, state aid, energy costs, special education costs, etc. These elements of our budget are out of our control. Would some of the assumptions be no more than a "wild guess"? Members of the committee expressed concern about spending a lot of time on a long term budget model that requires making assumptions/predictions that are fictional. When budget decisions are made in the thousands of dollars, how can inexact projections be useful? Is the intention of the instrument to enforce certain expectations? It is not clear how, for example, long range budgeting would have helped us craft this year's budget. The committee thinks our budgeting process necessarily needs to be flexible given the many factors that come into play over which we have no control and that flexibility has enabled us to manage budget challenges effectively.

Committee members discussed that the impulse to think long term is valuable and support focusing on an analysis of those elements of our school program and costs that we can control. Examining enrollment trends and preparing for the impact of smaller classes going up through K-12 is necessary and useful. The committee supports a BOE "summer summit" to discuss how we should respond to lower enrollment.

Submitted by Deirdre Burns