

A workshop session of the Dover School Board was called to order by Chairperson Marjorie Fisher on Monday, March 7, 2005, at 7:00 p.m. in the Office of the Superintendent for the purpose of discussing the Superintendent's proposed fiscal year 2006 budget.

**A. ROLL CALL:** Present were Heather Orion-Hindle, Marjorie Fisher, Kara Winton, Dorothea Hooper, Audra Lurvey, Carolyn Mebert, and Doris Grady.

Also present were Superintendent John O'Connor; Business Manager, Laurie Verville; Principal, Dover High School, Christopher George; Principal, Garrison Elementary School, Dennis Bentley; Principal, Horne Street School, Barbara Szabunka; Principal, Woodman Park School, Anne Watson; Principal Larry De Young, Dover Middle School; and Joanne Eaton, Facilities and Operations Manager.

**B. BUDGET DISCUSSION:** Superintendent O'Connor recapped the Joint Fiscal Committee Meeting held with the Mayor, City Manager, and City Councilors DeDe and Trefethen. Dr. O'Connor reported the group was initially concerned about the proposed budget's 7.1% increase but after Board members and the Superintendent addressed fixed costs including health, retirement, and contractual obligations, they understood and recognized this would also be an issue with the Council's budget. He added that after he and the Board addressed those concerns, City Councilors present at the meeting seemed reassured and pleased with the 33¢ tax impact. Dr. O'Connor also noted that the Councilors were very complimentary of the work done by the Board on the proposed fiscal year 2006 budget, as well as fiscally responsible work done by School Boards over the past 4 years. He ended by reminding Board members that the School District's final 2-3% increase last year had a negative impact on the City's tax rate.

Chairperson Fisher asked the Superintendent if he felt the City Council would pass the budget with a 33¢ increase on the tax rate. Superintendent O'Connor stated his belief that the three Councilors present at the Joint Fiscal Committee Meeting would vote to approve the budget. Doris Grady asked the Superintendent to clarify a statement made during the Joint Fiscal Committee Meeting concerning the increase in the County budget. Dr. O'Connor noted the statement had been made that the County budget would increase by 16%.

Ms. Fisher asked the Superintendent whether new positions were included in the budget. Dr. O'Connor stated that they were NOT included. He added it could be an issue to add new positions to the budget now because discussions during the Joint Fiscal Committee Meeting indicated to the Councilors that the Board would be submitting a budget with a 33¢ tax increase. Dr. O'Connor went on to state that they did discuss "pending" \$400,000 in additional staff and supplies. Councilors had questioned if the school district really needed those additions. The Superintendent stated that he explained that Dover is a District in Need of Improvement and discussed the implications of that designation and its potential impact on positions.

Chairperson Fisher asked the Superintendent if he would be able to "get by" without those new positions. Dr. O'Connor stated his concern if the Board presented a budget with a greater than 33¢ tax increase, City Councilors might think "we were less than candid." He added that he did make it clear that the positions were needed and asked the Board to give him some "flexibility between now and August to address those concerns." Final enrollment figures may allow the elimination of a teaching position that could be transferred to a math position. There is also the possibility that personnel could shift at Dover High School if classes do not meet minimum enrollments. It might be that a teacher could be moved to Health/Wellness/PE. As for supplies

included in the \$400,000 request, the Superintendent reported that he and the Business Manager were reviewing the current budget, which was frozen last December, to see if there is any additional money that could be used to purchase supplies needed for next school year.

Ms. Grady added that it had been made clear during the Joint Fiscal Committee Meeting that adequacy aid money coming in from the state was not "set in stone" and, if any extra money was to come it, the Council understood the School Board would need it for operations. The Superintendent added that the Council understands if the district loses up to one-half million in adequacy funding, that would increase the tax rate impact to approximately 50¢ and "they can live with that." However, if the \$400,000 in additional requests were added to the budget now, and if the one-half million dollars in adequacy aid was not received, that would increase the tax rate by approximately 75¢, and "they wouldn't like that."

Ms. Grady asked whether increases in gas and oil prices had been factored into next year's budget. Ms. Verville explained that she would be going out to bid for contracts and would also attempt to bid cooperatively with the city for the best possible contracts in these volatile markets. She added that an average 13% increase had been budgeted for these utilities.

The Superintendent asked to clarify the direction of the Board – that they "were tentatively approving the February 7<sup>th</sup>, Revision 3 budget at a 33¢ tax increase." Carolyn Mebert asked the Superintendent to clarify that the \$400,000 in new positions and supplies previously requested was not included in the 33¢ tax increase. The Superintendent responded that it was not included. Dr. Mebert then asked if an additional computer lab was included in the \$400,000 request. The Superintendent stated that it was included in the budget proposal and was not part of the \$400,000 in additional request. He added that would be part of the "flexibility" in the budget when it came time to establish priorities. Dr. Mebert asked whether a lab could be run in the high school library where computers already exist. Principal George responded that initial reports from Barrington, Nottingham, and the Dover Middle School indicated that a significant number of incoming ninth graders would not be able to test out for ½ computer credit and would not be coming into Dover High School with that ½ credit. That meant there may be up to 500 additional students taking computer. He added that he would not have "hard numbers" until after March 21<sup>st</sup>.

Ms. Grady asked if the computer lab in the vocational area was being utilized all of the time. Principal George stated that it was being used a majority of the time. Ms. Grady then asked if the computer test had been changed over the years. Principal George stated that the current test is outdated and that students would need to have better skills than those that the test reveals. He added that he is also looking to incorporate new state requirements when developing a revised test. Ms. Grady asked Principal George to clarify a statement concerning Dover Middle Schools "testing out" for the ½ computer credit. Mr. George stated that he was looking to create a test to offer to all incoming students, including those from Dover Middle School. Ms. Grady stated that, "For years, we've asked to have a computer curriculum so after eight years, kids should be able to pass that test." She added that, from the revised test, "We need to look at our curriculum to get kids to pass the test. What you come up with for a test will make a difference."

Ms. Grady noted that the Board needed to know before they left the meeting that night whether or not they had the votes to pass the budget next Monday. She added, if not, they needed to realize that with a 3-3 vote on Monday, the budget would fail and the Superintendent would not

have a budget ready for the Council the March 15 deadline. "We need to know how we stand tonight before we leave."

Heather Orion-Hindle asked if this budget addressed the impact of the recently negotiated Paraeducator contract because she felt that should be done prior to the Board approval of this budget. Superintendent O'Connor stated the negotiated contract had not yet been ratified by the union or approved by the Board, but that the impact would be less than \$30,000. Laurie Verville advised that increases due to the negotiated contract had been factored into the budget.

Chairperson Fisher asked for a show of hands, "Is everyone generally okay with the budget the way it is – with the 33¢?" There was a unanimous consensus of opinion that the Board was satisfied with the Superintendent's budget and requested that be presented to the Board for a vote at the March 14h regular meeting.

**C: ADJOURNMENT:** Audra Lurvey, Kara Winton seconded, to adjourn nonpublic session at 7:30 p.m. A roll call **VOTE PASSED 7/0.**

Respectfully submitted,

AUDRA LURVEY, Secretary  
Dover School Board  
AL/kgb  
March 8, 2005