



**DOVER SCHOOL
DISTRICT**

DOVER SCHOOL BOARD – MINUTES

Meeting Type: Budget Workshop
Meeting Location: City Council Chambers
Meeting Date: **Tuesday, February 16, 2010**
Meeting Time: **6:30 pm**

A workshop session of the Dover School Board was called to order by Chairperson Carolyn Mebert on Tuesday, February 16, 2010, at 6:35 p.m. in Council Chambers for the purpose of discussing the Superintendent's proposed fiscal year 2011 budget.

A. ROLL CALL: Members present were Carolyn Mebert, Audra Lurvey, Beth Setear, Doris Grady, and Robert McCrory. Absent were Matt Mayberry and Kenneth Appel.

Also present were Superintendent John O'Connor, Laurie Verville, Business Administrator; Jean Briggs, CIA Director; Patrick Boodey, Principal WPS; Sandi Crosson, Pupil Personnel Services Director; Christine Boston, Co-Principal DMS; Malcolm Forsman, Principal HSS; Peter Wotton, Athletic Director; Dustin Gray, GES Principal; and Leslie Modica, *Foster's*.

B. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: Audra Lurvey led the Board in the Pledge of Allegiance.

C. CITIZEN'S FORUM:

Amanda Russell, 20 Cranbrook Lane Street - Stated she is concerned about all teacher and paraprofessional cuts being considered. However, she spoke about music because that is her field. She stated that taking instrumental music out of the school day is the first step to removing more of our cultural heritage. Communities used to have multiple bands and they do not anymore. Removing instrumental music will mean only those who can afford to pay for private instruction will pursue it. She also stated she could not support the 'pay to play' option. She noted too many families would struggle to find the money to rent or purchase an instrument and the kids go without. Lastly, she stated a lot of research indicates that students who are 'pulled out' of regular instruction time for instrumental lessons actually excel in academics above their peers who do not play in academics.

Michelle Holt-Shannon, 14 Florence Street – She is the DMS PTA President and stated the five PTA's are coming together to inform parents that the budget is coming up and they should contact their leaders to have their voices heard. Additionally, the PTA's are discussing ways to build a coalition of all of the PTA's for collective action, coming together for an audience with the City Council. On a personal note, she stated she could find no fat to trim in the budget. She also stated her belief that given the impact of the spending cap, this is the year to seek an override for the school budget.

D. BUDGET DISCUSSION:

Dr. O'Connor provided a brief recap of budget discussions up until this point. He noted the Board still needed to cut approximately \$1,100,000 to reach the tax cap budget of no more than \$44,464,121. In order to accomplish this, he presented Board members with three lists. First was the list of administrator and Superintendent recommended cuts provided during the first



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budget workshop; Second was a list of proposed cuts submitted by Board member, Matt Mayberry; and Third was an updated list of administrator and Superintendent recommended cuts, combining items from the first two lists:

Administrator & Superintendent Updated List of Recommended Cuts
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Dr. O'Connor continued, "We need to reduce \$1.1 million in approximately 2-1/2 weeks. We're having discussions, but tonight we need to make some decisions." While referencing List #3, he said, "The right hand column represents about 12 items, I provided you with a list of some recommendations that I have come up with. They have been tepidly, half-heartedly supported by the administrators. They do not want to see any of these cuts, but we have to make some decisions. If you are so inclined, you can reduce (the budget)...by \$511,443." He added, "The reason I have provided you with this list is, as painful as this will be for you, this will be the easiest part of the process. The next \$600,000 will have an impact on the school district. You'll be looking at staff, some very well-respected programs that are heavily subscribed, that are good for kids; that we may have to be making some serious reductions in those."

	Amount
Curriculum Adoption	\$200,000
DHS Summer School	\$17,000
Elementary Teacher	\$75,000
Career Technical Center	\$50,000
DMS Family & Consumer Sci.	\$20,000
Facilities Management	\$20,000
Supplies	\$28,000
Non-Union Salary Reduction	\$20,000
UNICCO Contract Reduction	\$29,500
DHS A/V Aide	\$30,568
DMS Library Aide	\$21,375
Total	\$511,443

Doris Grady asked Dr. O'Connor if the \$17,000 for DHS Summer School would eliminate the program entirely or just a portion of it. Dr. O'Connor stated the \$17,000 would cut out the administrative and some teacher costs. He added that the program could still be run if enrollment fees are increased.

Doris Grady stated she understood the Superintendent was looking for the Board to cut \$500,000 this evening if possible. She added, "Apparently this is the administrator's and Superintendent's recommendation for whom we pay the money to manage the system. Therefore, they should have a pretty good idea where these cuts could be made. Under Career Technical Center, I had questioned that with Mr. Amara, because I would have hated to see biotech go. But that doesn't mean that biotech will be leaving because he has made another arrangements with the University of New Hampshire to carry on that program with a savings of \$50,000. From our last meeting, Mr. McCrory asked a question on the UNICCO contract and (the business manager) came up with almost \$30,000 which I think is a good idea.

Doris Grady moved, Audra Lurvey seconded, to accept the administrator's and Superintendent's updated list of recommended cuts to begin the process of cutting \$1.1 million.



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Mr. McCrory asked for clarification - if they voted to make the list of cuts this evening, Board members may still revisit these items. Dr. O'Connor stated that was correct. The Board can revisit all cuts and/or additions right up until the budget is sent to the City Council. He agreed with Mr. McCrory's concern that the list may generate feedback from parents and, after hearing from them, Board members may want to go back and rethink an item.

Chairperson Mebert called for a vote. An oral **VOTE PASSED 5/0.**

Dr. Mebert asked questions and made comments: "I was wondering about a CTC expenditure that is new this year for \$20,000 on page 24 for building rental, animal science." Ms. Verville stated that was for the new equine program. Those fees were in the budget last year in a 'lump sum'. This year, object codes were broken out so it may appear that it is a new expenditure but it is actually in its second year.

Dr. Mebert next commented on possible user fees: "I know that user fees are not popular. There are school districts that charge as much as \$425 a year for instrumental music and some of those districts have not seen a decline in participation. One of the things that I've been asking as I've been looking around in districts in New Hampshire and Massachusetts about this issue is, 'Do you see a decline in participation and what do you do with the children who are financially strapped?' There are provisions made – every school district that asks for user fees also has provisions for scholarships, or for waivers of those fees; some districts just budget in a 25% contingency assuming that 25% of their kids who want to participate are going to need some kind of financial support in order to participate. In the meantime, they are generating revenue that helps pay for all of these expensive but, absolutely worthwhile programs. This is something that I think we really have to start looking at now."

Dr. Mebert read some of the ranges of fees being charged for athletics in other districts. She continued, "Because we want to maintain as many of these programs as we can, we really have to start looking into having people pay. That includes busing. There are school districts in New Hampshire that have been charging for busing for quite a long time and some school districts that have been charging for athletics participation since 1996 have seen no drop off in participation. I think that's really important information for us to have. While I'm gathering the information, talking to different school board chairs, and looking at online websites, I'm also going to ask the Superintendent...to provide us with some information." Dr. O'Connor stated he will have a presentation for the next meeting to discuss schools in New Hampshire and Massachusetts who have implemented user fees over the years and provide price ranges for certain activities including busing fees right up through athletics and clubs.

Doris Grady stated she had received a lot of parental feedback on the Superintendent's first list that included a cut in Instrumental Music, \$150,000. She asked if this would be a partial cut to the program in grades K-12. Dr. O'Connor stated that was correct. Ms. Grady added that many of the people who contacted her made the assumption that the entire program would be



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eliminated. She continued, "I asked to get some figures on approximately what we're spending in the city for the music department and for music for our children. We're coming up with pretty close to \$800,000 a year spent in music. If we have to deal with the cuts, then I think we can eliminate some of 'panic city' by indicating that is not total reduction of Instrumental Music. But I also want parents to understand, we are putting in a huge amount of money into the music program so that all the students still have availability to that program."

Beth Setear asked the Superintendent to explain what specifically that \$150,000 reduction would mean. Dr. O'Connor stated this would be the dollar value associated with the elementary instrumental teacher and the middle school instrumental teacher. If those two positions were to be cut, it would be somewhere in that range. He added, "Keep in mind, just an informal survey of the principals today, at fourth grade alone, you're probably talking close to 175 kids who are involved in the band program. In 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th grade, there are 110 in 5th and 6th grade followed by the 7th and 8th grade that probably run 60 or so kids. That's a lot of kids that we're involving for not a lot of money and it's a great program! But it's not required."

Ms. Grady asked if fourth grade students were receiving free lessons. Dr. O'Connor stated that was correct. Ms. Grady asked if consideration had been given to eliminating instrumental instruction only at grade four and to continue working with grades 5 through 12. Dr. O'Connor stated the Board could certainly look at that. Ms. Grady noted, "Because I know for years and years, we as parents always had to pay for the lessons that the kids were taking. They were actually furnished by staff members in the school system but we paid them after school to give lessons to those kids. That was a pay-as-you-go and we did it in fourth grade." Dr. O'Connor agreed – the Board could look at eliminating a single teacher or maintaining both but introducing a user fee to offset some of the cost.

Audra Lurvey asked how many instruments the District actually owns. Dr. O'Connor stated there are very few. The high school owns most of the large instruments (tuba, drums) but the smaller instruments are all individually owned. It is the same at the middle school. We own the larger instruments (drums, bassoon, and tuba). We buy instruments periodically but they are the big instruments that make up the marching band or the orchestra. Audra Lurvey noted the Rochester School District maintains a cache of instruments that students who cannot afford one are able to borrow. Dr. O'Connor stated all of the students in fourth and fifth grades buy or rent their own instruments. 80% are privately owned, purchased, or rented.

Robert McCrory asked if the two instrumental teaching positions are currently occupied. Dr. O'Connor stated they are. Mr. McCrory then asked the Superintendent to discuss the addition of a second ESL teacher for \$77,516 on one of the Superintendent's first lists. Dr. O'Connor explained that item is not in the budget – it was on a list of items eliminated by the Superintendent prior to submitting his proposed budget.



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Mr. McCrory asked if the Special Education Placement (\$75,000) had been eliminated. Dr. O'Connor stated it had not, but the Board could certainly add it to the list of cuts and they will be approaching a \$600,000 reduction.

Mr. McCrory moved, Audra Lurvey seconded for discussion, to eliminate \$75,000 from Special Education Placements because we can anticipate a savings.

Dr. Mebert asked if that \$75,000 was SPED tuition only and if out-of-district transportation would be adjusted as well. Dr. O'Connor stated it was for tuition only. Transportation will be discussed with Ms. Crosson separately to see if there are any economies in that line item as well.

Audra Lurvey expressed her concerns that \$75,000 equates to one person and if we end up having a child that is pulled out of a placement and then has medium-high needs, then we could be hiring another person to take care of that child. Dr. O'Connor stated that was correct and that it is basically a trade-off, adding, "You never know what's going to happen with families moving in and of the district."

Dr. Mebert asked if, right now, the remaining \$1,000,000 SPED budget included contingency funds to cover those types of situations. Dr. O'Connor stated that there is always some adding, "There's always a little bit of flexibility in there. We look at our current enrollments and placements. We know what the dollar values of those placements are. We know that just like everything else, your tuition bill goes up every year just like taxes go up every year. We know that they are going up. Some have told us what those increases were. Others are giving us ballpark figures right now. We try to build that in."

Chairperson Mebert called for the vote. An oral **VOTE PASSED 5/0**.

Dr. O'Connor stated the Board was now near \$586,000 in cuts!

Dr. Mebert read points written by Mr. Appel who knew he would not be present at the meeting:

- Mr. Appel's suggestion was to charge user fees (a repetition of what was discussed earlier).
- Even though the firefighting and landscaping programs are very desirable, we cannot fund them this year.
- He does not support deferrals of things that are needed like updated curricula and textbooks.
- Kindergarten programs are essential to preparing disadvantaged students for first grade so we shouldn't be reducing those.
- Some of the largest cuts proposed for Dover Middle School – he believes Dover Middle School is starting to deal with problems that caused it to be a School in Need of



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Improvement – to support those cuts, he would need to be convinced that such cuts would not reverse the progress that is being made

- He supports as “among the least of the evils,” the \$150,000 reduction in Instrumental Music K-12 proposed by the Superintendent and the \$50,000 reduction in the biotech program for the Career technical Center

Doris Grady stated she also has a request into the office for a figure on staff development and the amount of money in the budget. “I checked the budget. Apparently right now it’s \$20,728 total staff development and the Superintendent’s recommended money was \$98,447. I had a request in for an exact figure on that and was just curious where we have so many schools in need of improvement, and we’ve been doing all of this staff development that has been rather costly, whether or not (and I’m not looking for an answer tonight) whether or not we could consider freezing staff development for one year only. The teachers, using the same time, to just work on their own buildings, their test scores, their skill weak areas, and just see if that won’t help us get us back up where we should be.”

Dr. O’Connor explained, of the \$98,000 Ms. Grady references, \$70,000 to \$85,000 of that is negotiated with the unions for tuition reimbursement and cannot be cut without union approval. Ms. Grady stated, “We may be able to salvage \$45,000 out of it with just a one year freeze and in-school release time spent on looking on weak skill areas.” Dr. O’Connor stated that less than \$20,000 is non-contractual. Approximately \$75,000 is contractual and could not be changed. If the Board were to say no staff development next year, it would save under \$20,000.

Jean Briggs-Badger provided Board members with a table of professional development from the 2005-2006 school year through the 2009-2010 school year. When new curriculum are implemented, we feel it is important that teachers are provided with the necessary training for them to be successful. She added that a lot of federal grant money is used to fund the summer institutes and many other opportunities offered to the Dover teachers. Also, the SES Regional Workshop Day was cut three years ago (a savings of \$17,000). The District now plans its own and professional development day and it is conducted in-house.

Ms. Grady added that in 2006-2007 the District spent \$6,600 for staff development and in 2009-2010 the figure has increased to \$36,000. She felt that was a large increase for a three year period of time. She stated that after she receives the data she requested by the office, she will review and bring it back for discussion later.

Robert McCrory asked an item on the report, *Fiscal Year 2010-2011, Superintendent Budget by Object Code*. On the very top line for salaries, the current budget shows \$796,596 and for staff proposed \$1,282,000. He asked the Superintendent to explain the increase. Dr. O’Connor explained these were **requests** made by administrators for new staff but they are **not** in the budget. The Superintendent eliminated all requests for new staff before he presented his proposed budget to the Board.



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Beth Setear referred to the Superintendent's original budget proposal, noting it included a savings of \$25,000 in facility improvements. The administrators had rated this item priority 1 (least painful cut to make). Dr. O'Connor asked Ms. Verville to explain where that money recommended early on to be cut, was coming from. Ms. Verville stated that \$25,000 would be used to pay for any capital improvement item not covered in the Unicco contract. Although Unicco has been very generous, picking up the cost of emergent items costing \$750 to \$1,000, if something major goes, the District will need to pay for that. Ms. Setear asked if \$25,000 would have been a reduction in a larger line item or if it represented the entire line item. Ms. Verville stated it would cut the entire line item for facility improvements.

Dr. Mebert referred to page 37 of the budget showing a \$5,000 increase for the Resource Officer. She asked Ms. Verville to explain that increase. Ms. Verville stated the position was originated and paid for by both the District and the Dover Police Department using grant money. The grant funding has reduced each year, until it was eliminated entirely this year. The Police Department continues to provide their share for this position and they also experienced a \$5,000 increase in funding for next year. Dr. Mebert reported the total dollar value for that position is actually \$42,798 including salary and benefits. That increase is \$6,699.

Dr. Mebert stated it seems there is a lot of money in the budget for repairs, especially for the Career Technical Center. Dr. O'Connor explained a lot of the original equipment that is used for programs at Career Technical Center require replacement or repair. He provided examples of some of the most recent items falling under this category including, paint booth (auto body repair program), pneumatics lifts (whose replacement was a safety issue in the automotive program), and greenhouse windows (the pully system that opened and closed the windows kept malfunctioning), all costly items. He added that the Career Technical Center is now 22 years old and many of the programs are using original equipment which is now failing. Dr. O'Connor added that the supplies for the Career Technical Center are costly because many items are consumables. Dr. Mebert asked if it would be possible to keep those amounts level funded at the current year level. Stating that the increases in some of those line items might when added together might be able to save \$5,000 or more. Dr. O'Connor explained that last year's budget may have contained a lump-sum item that has been broken down in this budget. While it appears those line items are increased, it may be that they are just added separately. Ms. Verville added that some large line items had been re-distributed under all the areas in which they should be recorded for programs. She explained that if she were to run the operating budget for the entire Career Technical Center, it would be level funded. Dr. Mebert noted the bottom line increase in the Career Technical Center is showing 6.06% but recognized it might be primarily for salaries and health benefits. Ms. Verville stated that was correct.

Dr. Mebert then stated she was not completely satisfied with figures for water, sewer, and McConnell Center rent in the budget. "I really don't think that we should go up in rent, no matter what the City says, because we're working with a budget mandated by the City. We shouldn't



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be giving them more money than a level funded budget allows for.” Dr. O’Connor stated that subject will come up between now and June 30th.

Ms. Grady wanted parents to understand the user fees being investigated by Dr. Mebert and the Superintendent included more than just the athletics program. Dr. Mebert stated that was correct – fees for athletics, clubs, student activity fees, busing, band, among others, are being investigated. Dr. Mebert provided some of the fees currently being charged by districts throughout the state and Massachusetts. She added that most also districts include user fee guidelines with statements within the policy for exemptions and waivers.

Mr. Grady reiterated her desire for parents to understand it’s not only one area being investigated for fees, but many areas in fairness to all of the kids.

Robert McCrory asked to discuss an item from Mr. Mayberry’s list. On page 81 of the budget there is a line item for 100 PC’s at the cost of \$100,000. Mr. McCrory suggested the Board discuss a partial reduction. He stated, “I wasn’t going to zero it out so that there would be something to work with if they were buying upgrades as opposed to an entire PC. Before I did that, I wanted to see if the administration had anything to add to what we had learned last time.”

Dr. O’Connor reminded that Board that he had already reduced the technology budget by \$64,000 in his original budget presentation and submission. Dr. O’Connor stated, “Let me give you what the hardware numbers are. We’ll break out the technology budget to staff, benefits, and then the supplies and equipment.” Mr. McCrory indicated he did not need that information, noting that he had learned enough during Mr. Roberge’s address at the last meeting. He added, however, that since the Board has to make cuts, he would rather cut “things” than people. He added, “You can do an awful lot of upgrades when you are just changing out boards as opposed to an entire computer. I wouldn’t want to zero it out of course. I see that they had asked for \$150,000 and you had recommended \$100,000, and I was going to make a motion, after everybody has their discussion, that that be reduced.”

Doris Grady noted that in the whole budget, there are “technology costs all over the place.” She asked the Superintendent to provide a total list of the amount of money invested in technology beyond that \$100,000. Dr. O’Connor stated he would provide that.

Robert McCrory moved, Beth Setear seconded for discussion, to reduce the technology line item from \$100,000 to \$25,000.

Ms. Setear reminded Board members that the budget started at \$150,000 and to reduce it to \$25,000 would be too drastic a cut. She also added that she agrees with Chris Roberge, we have to replace some of the old PC’s. Dr. Mebert noted that just changing out boards would be a good idea because it could be done much cheaper, but the District does not have the staff to do that. Ms. Grady agreed that she would vote no tonight and when the Superintendent



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provides a breakdown of the total amount of money in the budget for technology, the Board will be able to make better decisions. Audra Lurvey stated she also would not support the motion at this time. Since staff is required by the Board to use EdLine and MMS as part of their day-to-day operation, the District needs to continue to upgrade these technology pieces in order to go forward and maintain the path that we are on and the requirements they have already implemented.

Mr. McCrory stated he understood everyone's position but felt \$650,000 in technology, plus the curriculum development portion to be added to that, is a significant amount of money. Reducing the budget for technology by \$75,000 is only around 10%.

Chairperson Mebert called for a vote. An oral **VOTE FAILED 1/4 (Grady, Lurvey, Mebert, and Setear opposed)**.

Ms. Grady wanted to respond to public concerns that cutting staff will increase class sizes and that student education will suffer. She reminded those watching that the District has always kept class sizes below state standards. She stated that the lower grades K-1 the standard is 25. In grades 3 & up the state standard is 30 students. Ms. Grady continued, "We also furnish in addition to that, several paraprofessionals for almost all of the classes which is an additional aide in the classroom. So if you see your class jump up to 25 when we could have 30 (current enrollment numbers are running close to 23 or 24 at this time) that the quality of education is not going to change. If we've kept our numbers down... our results haven't been what we really like them to be. So I don't think there will be an effect. As you write us letters, we might assure you that things will be okay as far as quality is concerned."

Dr. Mebert asked a final question of the Superintendent. "Are you sure we need to increase the legal budget by \$27,000 for next year Your recommendation is for a \$50,000 budget for legal – we're \$23,000 right now. Do we need to jump that much?" Dr. O'Connor stated it all depends on contract negotiations. "If we are successful in negotiating contracts before June 30th and they pass, then I would say we can reduce that number. However, if they continue to drag on, then you will incur legal bills. We're basing it on the number this year – we're way over budget on that particular item."

Mr. McCrory asked the Superintendent to provide Board members with a breakdown of the multiple line items for supplies. He asked they be aggregated by categories. Dr. O'Connor stated he will provide that information. Dr. Mebert noted however, when all school supply accounts are totaled, the District spends \$225,404. That equates to \$54.42 per child. If that is reduced, for example, to \$50.00 per child, the savings would only be \$18,000. Dr. Mebert continued, "The Superintendent is suggesting an overall \$20,000 reduction in supplies. I'm not sure how much lower we can get."



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Mr. McCrory stated he was really interested in looking at the library portion of the supply budget. "I'd be more interested in cutting or freezing the library budget than cutting a library aide." Dr. O'Connor stated he would provide that information. Dr. Mebert noted that the Board has cut the supply budget in the past and that is why the budget is smaller than it had been. Dr. O'Connor agreed, stating the supply budget has been "whittled away" over the past three years.

D: ADJOURNMENT:

Doris Grady moved, Audra Lurvey seconded, to adjourn at 7:45 p.m. An oral **VOTE PASSED 5/0.**