

**BELMONT SCHOOL COMMITTEE WORKSHOP MINUTES  
CHENERY MIDDLE SCHOOL COMMUNITY ROOM**

**April 13, 2010**

**7:30 p.m. – 9:30 p.m.**

Present: Ms. Ann Rittenburg, Chair  
Ms. Laurie Graham  
Ms. Becky Vose  
Ms. Karen Parmett  
Ms. Laurie Slap  
Mr. Dan Scharfman  
Dr. George H. Entwistle 3<sup>rd</sup>, Superintendent of Schools  
Ms. Janice Darias, Acting Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction  
Dr. Gerry Missal, Director of Finance, Administration and Capital Planning  
Ms. Julie Silverman, Human Resources Manager

The meeting was called to order by Ms. Rittenburg at 7:40 p.m. in the Chenery Middle School Large Community Room.

Ms. Rittenburg explained the purpose of this meeting: presentation of the Available Revenue Budget FY11. This presentation will be made again on April 14 for the Warrant Committee, at which time the town departments will also present their available revenue budget.

Ms. Rittenburg made a presentation on The Role of the Belmont School Committee in the Budget Process. In the presentation she explained that it is the school committee's role to review the budget prepared by the leadership council and presented by the superintendent. The presentation included an overview of the mission of public education. The school committee's role includes communicating the importance and purpose of the public schools, and to advocate for public investment in public education. The role includes ensuring that the school system has adequate funding to meet the needs of all students, and to advocate for that funding. It is the role of the school committee to convey the information about the consequences of not providing adequate funding.

Dr. Entwistle made a presentation about the available funds budget that:

- Reiterated the process of building the Student Needs Based Budget, and how that was based on input from the community and the 18-month strategy, clarifying budget priorities;
- Explained that the SNBB was approved at \$41,926,806, and the preliminary Warrant Committee allocation was \$39,403,904 – a difference of \$2,522,902 or 6% of the SNBB;
- Explained the process for developing the Available Revenue Budget, which minimized the impact to students, focused on the priorities of the long term goals and 18-month improvement strategy, avoided drama and maintained full transparency;
- Explained the Program Components of the BPS – student-centered (82% of the total SNBB) and organizationally-centered (18% of the SNBB), and noted that the reductions totaled 10% of the organizationally-centered components of the SNBB budget and 5% of the student-centered components of the SNBB;

- Listed the reductions in these program areas, in dollar amount and percentage of the total of the component;
- Described the impact of each of these reductions in all ten program components;
- Explained the itemized list of reductions.

Ms. Rittenburg invited the School Committee members to make comments or ask questions. Mr. Scharfman thanked the Superintendent and Leadership Council for doing the work to prepare the available revenue budget for their review. He asked the Chair for guidance on questions to ask. Dr. Entwistle asked for recommendations and advisement on the presentation since the same presentation will be delivered to the Warrant Committee tomorrow night. Ms. Rittenburg explained that the Available Revenue Budget will have to be approved by the School Committee, and it becomes the Non-Override Budget, presented to Town Meeting. Citizens will have the final say on which of the two budgets will be implemented. Ms. Vose also commended the Superintendent and Leadership Council for the presentation that makes the impact very clear. She expressed gratitude for maintaining at least some of the new proposals. Mr. Scharfman asked Dr. Entwistle to characterize the impact on the school system. He stated that there definitely will be an impact; however we did try to minimize the impact to students. Mr. Scharfman asked for a clarification on RTI. Ms. Slap asked for a clarification on the impact on science at the high school. Dr. Harvey explained that instructional time will be reduced by 25 minutes.

Ms. Rittenburg explained that the School Committee members just received this material, in order to see it before the presentation to the Warrant Committee. She noted that there is a School Committee meeting planned for Friday, April 16, 10:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m., to discuss the reductions further and ask questions.

She invited members of the audience to ask questions or make comments.

Kevin Cunningham asked a question if these items would actually be cut, or if there would be fees introduced to fund the program. Ms. Rittenburg explained that the School Committee will have to take a close look at that, and has the final authority to make the decision, but will consider carefully the recommendations of the Leadership Council. Mr. Cunningham asked what the strategy is to address the annual conversation of not having enough revenue. Ms. Rittenburg noted that the School Department doesn't have much revenue-generating capacity. Dr. Entwistle noted that he would also like to see a longer-term plan to provide adequate funding.

Ms. Parmett noted that this is a fundamental American problem, and wondered when the government would fund public education more. She noted that the SNBB was not a budget with frills – if you don't continue to move the district forward and sustain what you have, then you may actually have nothing. A lot of people have moved here for the quality of the schools. She noted the cuts in library, textbooks, technology – we won't know until those items fail what the actual cost is, and may actually be more than is being saved.

Ms. Rittenburg noted that the available revenue budget will probably be voted at the May 11 meeting.

Mark Paolillo agreed with Dr. Entwistle that we need to have a long-term plan for funding – and we can't expect the state or federal government to bail us out – we need to own the problem and convince the citizens that we need to infuse more money in the system. The Board of Selectmen supports an

override, and will be looking for the School Committee to explain where money from an override would be spent.

Anne Lougee commented on the problem of deferred maintenance – not filling open positions, cutting positions – and there is a much greater cost to deferring costs.

Ms. Rittenburg noted that the Chapter 70 numbers will be available tomorrow.

Ms. Graham shared an update from the Communications and Community Outreach Subcommittee. They met on April 9 with Dr. Entwistle to formulate talking points. The discussion centers on what we need and our capacity to fund it. The needs are fixed and the capacity is a choice. The needs are defined by the Student Needs Based Budget. Mr. Scharfman explained the talking points and asked for feedback from the other members of the School Committee.

Ms. Vose noted that Ms. Rittenburg's presentation about public education and the mission of the school committee is the "3000 foot" view and the talking points bring the message to the local level. Ms. Vose asked for more time to review it, and felt that they are on the right track.

Ms. Graham noted that more discussion on the talking points will take place at the meeting on April 16.

Ms. Vose noted the importance of being specific and clear about what the override will fund. Mr. Scharfman agreed that it is important to know what is being invested in, and what is being lost. He noted that the cuts are system-wide and also noted that it is important to explain why the cost of education increases each year. He noted that other towns are not cutting (Brookline, Lexington), and the answer to why Belmont has to cut should be in a FAQ. He asked the members to share questions to include in this section of the talking points. Ms. Rittenburg will consult with fellow EDCO members.

Ms. Rittenburg noted a concern with the statement "needs are fixed". Ms. Graham explained that the difference is between "wants" and "needs" – this isn't a "want" budget.

There will be more discussion on the talking points on Friday, April 16.

Kevin Cunningham asked how the School Committee members relate to the strategy to pass an override. Ms. Rittenburg noted that as long as they're not using public resources, there is a lot of latitude in what they can do. They will advocate for the funds required to fund the Student Needs Based Budget.

At 9:35 p.m. on a motion offered by Mr. Scharfman and seconded by Ms. Vose, it was:

**VOTED** unanimously (6-0) to adjourn the meeting.

Respectfully submitted by \_\_\_\_\_  
Laurie Graham  
Secretary