

**BELMONT SCHOOL COMMITTEE MINUTES  
CHENERY MIDDLE SCHOOL COMMUNITY ROOM  
FEBRUARY 11, 2015**

Present: Ms. Laurie Slap, Chair  
Ms. Anne Lougée, Secretary  
Mr. Thomas Caputo  
Dr. Lisa Fiore  
Ms. Laurie Graham  
Mr. John Phelan, Superintendent  
Ms. Janice Darias, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction  
Mr. Anthony DiCologero, Director of Business, Finance and Operations

Absent: Ms. Elyse Shuster

Student Representative: Daniel Vernick (arrived 7:40 p.m.)

1. **OPENING BUSINESS**

1.1 Call to order

Ms. Slap called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

1.2 Pledge of Allegiance

Ms. Slap led the Pledge of Allegiance.

1.3 Citizens' Concerns

There were no citizens' concerns.

1.4 Adjustments to the Agenda

There were no adjustments to the agenda.

1.5 Chair's Report

Ms. Slap thanked the faculty members present for attending the meeting. She also thanked the Belmont Department of Public Works (DPW) and the Belmont Public Schools (BPS) Buildings and Grounds staff for all the work they had done clearing the school parking lots and roads after the recent snow storms. Ms. Slap reported that tonight's FY16 budget presentation will be an overview and that great budget detail will be presented at the February 24 School Committee meeting.

1.6 Student Representative Report

There was no Student Representative report.

### 1.7 Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Phelan announced the passing of Deb Belshaw, a long-time aide at the Butler school, and led all those in attendance in a moment of silence.

Superintendent Phelan thanked the faculty members present for attending the meeting. He also thanked the DPW and BPS staff for all the work they had done clearing the school parking lots and roads after the recent snow storms.

Superintendent Phelan explained that Belmont has currently used 6 snow days and that if there are no additional snow days then June 23 will be the last day of school. He provided a brief explanation of the process of determining whether schools should be opened, closed or have a delayed opening.

## 2. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

There was no unfinished business.

## 3. MAJOR BUSINESS

### 3.1 FY16 Preliminary Budget Presentation – Exhibit A

Superintendent Phelan provided a PowerPoint presentation to explain the FY16 preliminary budget. He began with an overview of the BPS Schools Strategic Goals and Budget Goals for FY16:

#### **Strategic Goals**

1. To prepare all students for college, career, and life-long learning;
2. To support continuous improvement and overall programmatic and fiscal stability; and
3. To ensure that students receive instruction from consistently highly qualified educators who pursue continuous improvement of their art.

#### **Budget Goals**

1. Maintain the rigorous and high quality of instruction and student engagement for all students;
2. Maintain the staffing levels commensurate to the increase in enrollment needed to provide the existing quality of educational services to our students;
3. Maintain the well-rounded education comprised of rigorous academics, strong performing arts, high participation in athletics, and extra-curricular experiences;
4. Maintain Belmont as a Level One District; and
5. Maintain and support the continuous improvement of our staff through professional development.

#### **Pressure Points & Current Deficit**

Superintendent Phelan explained some of the pressure points on the district's budget that have resulted in an anticipated deficit of over \$500,000 for the second fiscal year, despite cost saving measures implemented each year. The two biggest pressure points are:

1. Increasing enrollment at all grade levels throughout the district; and
2. Increasing needs to support all students to access curriculum and maximize potential through Social/Emotional Learning (SEL) programs, supports, and curriculum.

Superintendent Phelan stated that enrollment has increased by 317 students over the last five years. Enrollment projections based on the NESDEC formula, plus an index of 30 students, predicts an additional 408 students in the next five years, for a total increase of 725 students from 2009–2019.

Superintendent Phelan also spoke about the increase in the number of English Language Learners (ELL). In FY14 there was a 72% increase in ELL's from FY13. In FY15, there has been an additional 23% increase since FY14, for a total of 222 ELL students. Of the ELL population, approximately 80 are deemed Level 1 (least proficient) and are required to receive 2.5 hours of small group instruction each day.

Superintendent Phelan stated that another pressure point related to enrollment is the financial impact of increasing Out of District (OOD) placements for students who require services that cannot be provided in district. As of January 20, there are 95 OOD students and an additional 5 students are awaiting evaluations. The average cost per OOD pupil is approximately \$65,000 per student inclusive of transportation. The average range of the cost per pupil is from \$50,000 - \$150,000 per student, inclusive of transportation.

Superintendent Phelan addressed the current year deficit, estimated at \$500,000 despite cost saving measures implemented in November 2014. He noted that the BPS has experienced deficits in each of the last two fiscal years (FY14 & FY15), and that the budget “freezes” and reduction measures have been implemented in four of the last five years.

Superintendent Phelan stated that the Belmont Public Schools has exhausted all available funds that have been used to combat past budget shortfalls related to special education services. He explained that:

- In previous years these line items have received supplemental funds through LABBB credits and that there are no projected LABBB credits available in FY16;
- Circuit Breaker funds allocated by the state for OOD expenses have been fully expended; and
- In addition to a \$200,000 Reserve Fund Transfer from the Town to balance FY14, Revolving Account balances were depleted to help close the gap.

Superintendent Phelan explained that the BPS takes part in several multi-town initiatives to gain cost-saving efficiencies in areas like:

- Special education services; special education transportation partnering with LABBB;
- Bulk purchasing of supplies, bulk purchasing of power, gasoline, and natural gas partnering with EDCO;
- Professional development services partnering with EDCO; and
- Utility cost by converting Belmont High School from oil to natural gas.

The BPS also collaborates with other Belmont Town departments through:

- The creation of a Town-wide Facilities Department;
- A history of strong relationships with the DPW and Highway Department;
- Providing space for Park and Recreation Department events;
- Partnering with the Police and Fire Departments on Safety and Security Committees; and
- Participation in the Green Communities initiative.

Superintendent Phelan noted that according to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), the state average per pupil expenditure in FY14 was \$14,571. DESE reported the BPS average per pupil expenditure was \$12,799, which is a difference of \$1,772. Superintendent Phelan explained that if the BPS budget was funded at the state average per pupil amount the budget would increase by \$7,773,764.

### **FY16 Budget – Two Options: Financial Task Force & Available Revenue**

#### **Financial Task Force Recommended Budget Assumptions**

Superintendent Phelan stated that the Belmont School Department fully supports the unanimous vote of the Belmont Financial Task Force (FTF) members to adopt the FTF's recommendation that additional revenue, through increased property taxes, is needed. He summarized the FTF recommended three-year budget for the BPS as follows:

1. Increase staff to address the needs with increasing enrollment, SEL supports and safety (10 positions in year one, 5 positions in year two, and 5 positions in year three);
2. Address the deficit drivers by funding alignment in the following budget lines that support:
  - Contracted Service mandated expenditures
  - Increase in Out of District mandated expenditures
  - Transportation (for both OOD and in district students); and
3. Address the one-time funding issue that resulted from the expenditure of LABBB credits in FY15.

By fiscally addressing these needs, Superintendent Phelan notes, the district will be able to maintain a level of service and the increase in funds will bring the budget to a level that is commensurate with the increase in demands brought on by the overall increase in enrollment.

Superintendent Phelan explained that the FY16 budget needs to pay for all state and federally mandated programs as well as address the district's internal needs. This includes:

- Payment of state mandated contracts service bills;
- Payment of state mandated out of district bills;
- Payment of state mandated transportation bills;
- Hiring two additional state mandated ELL teachers;
- Hiring additional Grade 4 teacher to serve the rising grade 3 cohort at the Wellington school;
- Moving current staff forward; and
- Account for one-time LABBB credits used in FY15.

## Available Revenue Budget

Given the state and federally mandated programs, contractual obligations, and other internal adjustments just described, Superintendent Phelan reported total expenses of \$49.163 million for FY16. With a base budget of \$46.156 million and an allocation of \$1.301 million in available revenue (AR) to the BPS, the total AR budget comes to \$47.457 million. Superintendent Phelan emphasized that the resulting shortfall of \$1.706 million **does not** include the majority of the FTF's recommendations for additional staff.

Superintendent Phelan explained that he, Mr. DiCologero, and the Leadership Council are working to determine what specific reductions will need to occur. This information will be made available at the February 23 School Committee meeting. The following categories show possible reductions and amounts:

- Cut approximately 22 positions (administrators, aides, facilities staff) - \$1,306,000
- Reduce instructional materials and supplies - \$150,000
- Reduce Professional Development - \$50,000
- Reduce Facilities Department - \$80,000
- Increase in Fees for Rentals - \$85,000
- Increase in Student/Family Fees (Athletics, Full Day Kindergarten, Clubs) - \$35,000

Superintendent Phelan noted that the Town of Belmont is at a crossroads and can either support the FTF's recommendation for additional revenue generated through a property tax increase or the Town of Belmont can implement the Available Revenue budget and face \$1.7 million in cuts to the school budget.

At the conclusion of the budget presentation and School Committee discussion several people from the audience made statements and/or asked questions. John Sullivan, President of the Belmont Education Association, read a statement on behalf of the BEA membership in support of the FTF recommended budget, citing the large class sizes as a detriment to effective teaching and learning. Student Representative Daniel Vernick reported that the growing class sizes at the high school have decreased the quality of instruction at that level. Ms. Mary Dominguez inquired about the lack of funds in the budget to address the need for additional space. Superintendent Phelan responded that those costs will come from the Town Capital Budget and that all parties understand the importance of addressing those needs in the near future. Ms. Cathy Larkin, a fine arts teacher at the high school, reported that the numerous federal and state mandates, combined with the large class sizes, have made teaching more difficult and less effective. Finally, Committee member Laurie Graham offered a reminder that the public schools are responsible for educating students with special needs from pre-school up to age 22.

#### 4. SUBCOMMITTEE/LIAISON UPDATES (as needed)

##### 4.1 Finance Subcommittee

No report.

4.2 Policy Subcommittee

No report.

4.3 Curriculum & Instruction Subcommittee

No report.

4.4 Capital Budget Committee

No report.

4.5 Warrant Committee

No report.

4.6 Wellington Building Committee

No report.

4.7 Financial Task Force

No report.

5. **OTHER BUSINESS**

5.1 Consent Agenda - none

5.2 Personnel Items - none

5.3 Business Items – None

5.4 Approval of Minutes

The vote on the minutes was postponed.

7. **FUTURE BUSINESS**

Upcoming Meetings:

February 17, 2015  
School Committee-Board of Selectmen Joint Meeting  
BOS Meeting Room – 6:00 p.m.

February 24, 2015  
Finance Subcommittee Meeting  
SAB Conference Room – 7:30 a.m.

February 24, 2015  
School Committee Meeting  
CMS Large Community Room – 7:00 p.m.

8. **ENCLOSURES**


February 1, 2015 Enrollment  
February 1, 2015 Enrollment indicating changes

8. **ADJOURNMENT**

At 8:40 p.m. on a motion offered by Ms. Lougée and seconded by Mr. Caputo, it was

**VOTED**           unanimously to adjourn the meeting.

Respectfully submitted by

  
Anne Lougée, Secretary