

**BELMONT SCHOOL COMMITTEE FINANCE SUBCOMMITTEE MINUTES**  
**REMOTE MEETING**  
**JANUARY 12, 2021**

Present: Ms. Amy Checkoway  
Mr. Michael Crowley  
Ms. Tara Donner  
Ms. Evelyn Gomez  
Mr. John Phelan, Superintendent  
Ms. Janice Darias, Assistant Superintendent  
Mr. Anthony DiCologero, Director of Finance, Business and Operations  
Mr. Michael McAllister, Director of Human Capital

Absent: Ms. Catherine Bowen  
Ms. Andrea Prestwich, Chair

**1. Opening Business**

Call to order

School Committee member Amy Checkoway called the meeting to order at 8:05 a.m.

**2. FY22 Budget Update**

With the upcoming week filled with joint meetings (FSC, FTF2, SC), the goal is to have all Town groups move forward in the budget process. Superintendent Phelan would like to focus on the school department's work, and he thanked Anne Helgen, Laurie Slap, and Ellen Schreiber for their feedback in the process. The Superintendent also met with PTO/PTA presidents to request help with conveying the school narrative to the public.

Focusing on FTF2 work, committee members are concerned with reduction in the staff exchange figure from 4.9% to 4.0%. This translates to a budget reduction of about \$300,000, and even an adjustment to 4.2% would remedy some of the reduction. Taking a historical look at the Town budget, Superintendent Phelan may revisit EL and SPED needs and mandated services. Any new FY21 hires around these positions will not be carried forward. Committee member Checkoway reminded the group to budget for what they think will be needed next year and to look to future needs.

Committee member Crowley is concerned about deep cuts to the school budget that may not be viewed as reductions. The School has a history of asking for a lower amount and returning any dollars not used to Town. Superintendent Phelan will continue to advocate at FTF2 meetings and during other discussions, balancing needs of the Town, the needs of the district and the funding amount the school department proposes.

Discussion then shifted to student SEL and academic needs in light of the pandemic, and whether a shift in budget priorities is needed. Committee members Gomez and Donner are concerned that in a time of so many challenges to education and student support, it is not the time to pull back. Currently, McLean Hospital and guidance counselor supports are in place and the request for a social worker is included in FY22 planning. The group will look at support lanes and will revisit the "COVID parking lot" to reassess other needed services for academic support. There is also a hope for more federal funding that can be utilized for transitioning students to more in-person learning and academic and emotional supports. This

budget year includes additional scenarios compared to usual including the amount and use of federal dollars, if any, override or not, and COVID needs.

Lisa Pargoli, Town Meeting member, spoke as a lifelong town member carrying the tax burden. She commented it is not necessary to increase the budget, given this economic situation with a recent tax bill increase of \$710 per quarter. The school department receives 60% of the Town budget, and people in town with no kids in school need something concrete in return. Ms. Pargoli believes renters coming in with kids are voting for the overrides but not paying the increase in taxes. Superintendent Phelan understood the difficulty and noted as a town that they are trying to balance all needs. Parents with children in school are paying extra fees (e.g., sports, transportation) and that also is a challenge.

The school committee discussed goals for the January/February timeline. They include budget public forums with concrete numbers and bringing student personal stories in to the budget conversation. They will continue meeting with the subcommittee of the Warrant Committee and focusing on educating, informing and articulating visioning work.

### **3. Washington D.C. Trip Refund Update**

Superintendent Phelan provided an update about the Chenery Middle school Washington DC trip that was canceled last April due to pandemic. The school department has been working with State to fight the travel agency that canceled the trip and did not refund families. A settlement came down last week with the Attorney General with a very low reimbursement figure covering only 21% of cost. Belmont was awarded \$47,000 but will need another \$150,000 to support families and make them whole. It is being put upon the school department to do this.

Ellen Schreiber asked for a different avenue to refund families other than through the operating budget. She urged the school committee to consider giving parents a credit towards activities or bus fee.

### **4. Other Updates**

Assistant Superintendent Darias gave an overview of The Student Opportunity Act. The Plan vote was delayed last spring due to the pandemic. Under the SOA, the district received a decrease in Chapter 70 funds, but is still required to do extra work. Central Office is reaching out to DESE to confirm appropriate budget lines in FY21-23 and will give an update at the School Committee meeting tonight.

### **4. Approval of Minutes- vote rescheduled to a future meeting**

- November 24, 2020 Finance Subcommittee Minutes
- December 1, 2020 Finance Subcommittee Minutes
- December 8, 2021 School Committee Minutes

### **5. Adjourn**

***On a motion offered by Mike Crowley and seconded by Evelyn Gomez, it was VOTED, unanimously on a roll call vote to adjourn the meeting at 9:23 a.m.***

Respectfully Submitted by  
  
Amy Checkoway, Acting Secretary