

Members present: Buhrmaster, Gordon, Hudson, Oriola, Mauro, Sosnow, Winchester
 Members absent _____

Administrators Present: Salvaggio, Bourgeois, Shea, Grastorf
 Administrators Absent: _____
 Also Attending M. Leon, Faculty and Community Members

I. Welcome -

Welcome

President Sosnow called the Regular Meeting of the Niskayuna Board of Education to order at 7:02 p.m.

II. Reports

Superintendent's Report

A. The Superintendent reported that Dr. Shea, along with teachers and administrators, are at work on the APPR. There was a meeting with NTA leadership on the APPR Appeals Process, resulting in a draft for APPR Committee. Separately, the Administrative APPR Committee is working on the next steps for forms and format for principals and administrators.

Current scheduling progress includes monitoring enrollments as part of staffing. Meetings are ongoing with high school master scheduler, but it is still a work in progress.

The superintendent spent Friday afternoon at the high school for the ½ day Professional Development Day, with Special Ed working on student goals development., and with Social Studies teachers, viewing the curriculum maps for their courses. She met with counselors regarding K-12 planning, PTO Council to discuss budget, and three separate parent meetings also about the budget. She was able to walk through and observe her first high school Governomics course which discussed supply-demand-and impact.

The superintendent also attended the TV Turn Off night at Craig, the Rosendale Learning Fair, Good Morning Glenclyff, and the HS concert.

An issue that has come up in recent meetings, specifically in Cabinet on 20th involves the reinstatement, redesign and repurpose of Academic Council.

There will be a student forum on the budget at the high school this Friday.

Board and Committee Reports

B. The Board of Education was represented at St. Baldrick's Shave for the Cure (even as a shaveree for Mr. Hudson!), Al Hunt's memorial service, Rosendale Learning Fair, PTO Council, several concerts, the Iroquois play, and a BOCES Career and Technical school meeting at which it was announced that the CTE received Middle States Accreditation without qualification.

Mrs. Mauro attended a Capital District Regional Planning Commission meeting during which a study was discussed which looked at Saratoga County Industrial PILOTs (payment in lieu of taxes). Although these pilots are handled within tax cap law, there is an unintended but adverse effect on school districts and municipalities.

Mr. Buhrmaster attended a meeting as a sports official, which included a follow up on sports regulations on concussions. For example, it was noted that an athlete cannot reenter competition without independent doctor's notice.

Board Officers met with a small group of teachers to discuss concerns at elementary, middle school and, high school levels.

First Class district email has experienced some difficulty. Board members were not receiving email forwarded from the school to personal accounts. It appears to have been fixed.

Glenclyff's PTO president contacted a Board member requesting an upgrade for the sign outside of the school.

III. Comments from the Community

Comments from the Community

MaryBeth Aldous, parent asked that the Board please keep discussion on a possible K-1 combo class open. Her questions to consider included:

Is it the best choice for our youngest students?

Is it a sound educational decision or driven by numbers?

Do we want to change a newly developed full-day kindergarten program?

How will screening and/or schedule be changed?

Colleen Pislavento asked for clarification of rumors in the community:

Will bussing be outsourced for all students? If so, who would she call with a concern for, for example, a child not getting home on time or getting off the right bus stop?

Will janitorial service to be outsourced?

With change in middle school schedule, will two bands from both middle schools come together to practice?

Has a decision been made about class size in the 4/5 combo class (currently listed as 27 students) Is there enough time for a teacher to prepare for a combo class for next year?

Ms. Pislavento voiced a concern about the number of administrative positions, and willingness to go above the 3.29% tax cap levy.

Guna Rat, parent, voiced "serious concerns about combination classrooms", His viewpoint is that they cut into core and will negatively affect the quality of education. He requested that Niskayuna retain its Explorers program.

Lonnie Wilson, teacher, parent, resident, spoke regarding the potential elimination of Freshman Seminar. Research shows that "one-shot deals" are not effective for behavior change. Four years ago, Freshman Seminar was developed based on data that showed a spike in risk behaviors between 8th and 9th grade, and to help to orient students to high school. She cited the Centers for Disease Control who note that students are more likely to succeed when they feel connected.

Steve Markham, parent resident, addressed comments about going modestly over the tax cap. Niskayuna must consider long-term sustainable programs. Another concern regards the risk of requiring a super majority. Since 2004, there are years during which the district has received less than 60% of vote. Last year brought the largest turnout. In last year's Budget Vote, had 25 fewer people voted yes, and the current supermajority requirement were in place, the budget would not have passed.

6th Grade students Lilly Brown, Naylah Williams, and Genesis Marte 6th spoke because "we are going to the school, and the budget cuts affect us". In VA, we like small teams because teachers can offer more help. Teachers at VA earn our respect.

Louis Manuta resident, parent of Niskayuna graduates, spoke to the quality of education as playing a great role in student success. Further, the quality of education in Niskayuna plays a large role in property values. He expressed concern over the "proposal of drastic cuts", and asked the Board to consider the amount of new development in Niskayuna. He believes that this growth has not been taken into consideration. For example, town sports clubs are seeing constant level or increase in activity. Mr. Manuta asked that the district provide copies of enrollment projections and their basis. One unknown is what will happen next year with the tax cap legislation. Mr. Manuta pointed out what he believes to be a discrepancy between the number of FTE reductions in the documents and asserted that it is the citizens of Niskayuna who should make the determination for how the Board should present the budget.

Peter Warren, teacher, passed.

Barbara Burgess, parent, resident, spoke in support of the Explorers Program. She questioned why the COGAT was not administered this year since it had not yet been decided whether there will be an Explorers Program next year. Explorers program is the only program for academically talented children. Since it serves the equivalent number of children as would attend one of the elementary school, it is not an elite program for a limited number of kids. If the Explorers Program is cut, the district will have wasted the resources that we currently have in the teachers and the program.

Comments from the Community (cont.)

Meredith Oakes, parent, stated opposition to combo classes, and the elimination of Explorers and the Elementary Foreign Language Program. She spoke of the use foreign language in her own career. She also asserted that a second language enhances early cognitive development. Foreign Language learners outperform control groups in Reading, Social Studies, and other areas. She asked that the Board please reconsider elimination of FLES.

John Lindsay, high school student told the Board that the Freshman Health Seminar helps students to assimilate into high school. He pointed out that SAFE (Students Advocating for a positive Environment) originated as one student's capstone project in this class. In addition, he asserted that Explorers develops the human brain in different ways from that of a traditional classroom by challenging students to solve problems in unique ways. It is a place where a student can receive individual attention. As regards FLES, he pointed out that he will be engaging in a student exchange trip over April break, visiting a country where students have been learning English since starting school.

The Board responds and clarifies:

Board Response

Outsourcing - On the most recent Level I Reduction list, this item has moved from a savings of 135k to 45K, indicating a lesser level of outsourcing for next year. We currently outsource some transportation (Special Education and out of district runs). Transportation involves a bargaining unit with whom, under NYSUT, full outsourcing would need to be negotiated. We anticipate having our bus fleet, our transportation director, our drivers, and our mechanics next year. Information on RFPs (Request for Proposal) for potential outsourcing of Transportation and Operations & Maintenance is available on the website.

Enrollment figures used for staffing to enrollment are current and actual, and are being monitored as the budget is being developed. There is a distinction between staffing to enrollment at elementary vs. high school levels, one being based on enrollment, the other on schedule requests.

The new middle school schedule will have band during the school day. FLEX will be gone, and all 6th graders will have Reading in addition to English Language Arts as part of their schedule. Elementary and high school start times will remain the same. Middle school start and end times will be 15 minutes earlier than the current year's schedule.

Regarding middle school class size, teams will vary as they do now.

Regarding administrators, the district has nine directors, not 20.

The decision was made not to administer the COGAT until a decision was made on the Explorers Program, due to cost of \$10k.

In answer to a comment that it is not enough for students to do "just fine in combination classes", Mr. Winchester related his experience in district over 43 years, teaching all levels, including combination classes. To clarify, students can do very well in combo classes, learning appropriately and having good experiences just as they would in single grade classes. Combination classes can be a rich learning experience.

A clarification was made regarding the statement that the teachers received a 0% increase last year. Contractually, our teachers receive both a "step" increase for years of service, as well as a percentage increase which is negotiated contractually. Niskayuna teachers agreed to a contractual 0% increase last year, and a .5% increase this year. This did not affect the step increase received which averages 2.5 – 3% increase, and drives budget costs accordingly.

Board Response
(cont.)

Money has been put aside for summer curriculum work for teachers to have time to plan appropriately for classes next year.

In a meeting with Senator Farley, it was requested that he advocate for

- Health Care Reform, perhaps getting the state to assist in provision of health care.
- Mandate Relief. (i.e. state requirements for IDEA exceeds national requirements, putting the burden on the NYS mandated IDEA without funding it.)
- Pension Reform- Although action taken via creation of Tier 6, it will take time for the effects of this action to produce relief.

He was given a document called *Let New York Work* put together by organizations like NYSSBA, NYSCOSS, and other individual and industry related organizations.

A question was brought forward – "What would this budget look like if we didn't have the tax cap"? The answer is that it might look very much the same, because what is driving the decisions is the revenue gap of \$4.1 million.

IV. Consent Agenda

Consent Agenda

Mr. Winchester moved that the Board of Education, upon the recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools, approve the actions recommended in the consent agenda listed in item A of ASM IV. Mrs. Gordon seconded. Motion carried 7-0.

A. . . . approve the Minutes of Regular Board Meeting of March 20, 2012

Minutes

V. Instruction

VI. Business

Board Budget Discussion:

Budget Discussion

What would it look like to live within the tax levy threshold for Niskayuna of 3.29%. We must ask what happens if we lose the vote?

FLES program -

It was pointed out that money was not added to the budget to create this program. Money had been diverted from the high school foreign language program in order to create this program.

No educational reason to remove the program – only budgetary.

Are options available such as grant monies, offerings through ASEP program? If funds could be found, Board members will support. Board member asked that we do not apply the "last in first out" rule to programs that have more recently developed.

Will Board members support going over the threshold of 3.29%?

Budget Discussion
(cont.)

Pro – Some feel that there may be a compelling reason to go slightly above the tax cap which has been imposed on our district, based on what is best for our district. The Board can then respond responsibly to what the school district voters tell us on the day they vote.

Con – Some clearly stated a desire to stay within the tax cap. Going over will reflect badly on the district as we become the poster child for the governor’s criticism. It was noted that opinions heard outside of Board meetings are quite different from those heard during them.

If the Board were to go over the threshold by a reasonable amount, a concern that arises is what we stand to lose. How would the district come up with another \$1.6 million in reductions if the budget were voted down and contingency budget rules took effect?

Qualified – Some Board members reported that there are those in the community who have answered this question by saying “There is a scenario under which I would support going modestly over the cap; I am willing to sacrifice, but will not do it by myself.” (i.e. qualified with concessions

Qualified support includes importance of property value. The risk of going over must also be understood. There is a concern about going over cap because of how close the vote was last year. Within the tax cap, quality will be retained, although maybe not the same comfort level.

If the Board were to add back Explorers, FLES, and some strategic teaching positions, what would the budget tax levy be? Are there other items from the reduction list that the Board would like to consider placing back into the budget? Media Specialist, Instructional Technology position in summer, HS Sectioning to reduce class size, elementary staff to reduce combo classes potentially

When Board adopts budget, it adopts a spending plan – what we are voting on is how much money can be spent.

VII. Personnel

VIII. General

IX. Executive Session

Executive Session

Mr. Winchester moved to convene to Executive Session to discuss collective negotiations pursuant to article 14 of the civil service law, and a matter leading to the potential discipline, suspension, dismissal, or removal of a particular person or persons. Mr. Hudson seconded. Motion carried 7-0.

(Return to Public Session)

X. Adjournment

Adjourn

There being no further business, Mr. Winchester moved to adjourn the meeting at 11:37 p.m. Mr. Hudson seconded. Motion carried 7-0.