

Prepared by Rick Cliffe

**Note: (1). These are not official minutes -- -- just notes taken by me at the hearing. I have tried to capture the essence of the discussion, particularly questions/comments from the public and school administration/committee responses. I did not attempt to capture the names of individuals asking questions or comments.**

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**THE MEETING:** There were approximately 30 members of the public present. The full School Committee, Superintendent, Financial Administrator and Principal were all present.

**PRESENTATION:**

Nina Roth-Wells introduced Eileen King, AOS 98 Superintendent. She asked that questions be held until the presentation was complete. Ms. King presented the proposed budget, using a series of presentation slides which were also provided as handouts. The budget spreadsheets were the same format/content of those reviewed last week when the Selectmen met with the Financial Advisory Committee. There were a couple of late-breaking changes. During the presentation, Ms. King highlighted and explained the rationale for specific line items that were significant changes from the previous year's budget. In my judgment, the following items were the most important things covered during the presentation.

**Total Budget:** The proposed total budget of \$2,061,489 is a net decrease of \$23,837 from last year's budget of \$2,085,326. This decrease is largely due to a \$89,156 decrease in Special Education tuition. Note: One of the late-breaking changes was identification of an additional special needs student. In previous drafts, this decrease was projected at \$167,709. If not for the Special Education tuition savings, which is not discretionary, the proposed budget expenses would be a net increase of \$65,319 (3.7%).

**Town Assessment:** The proposed assessment of \$1,793,554 is a decrease of \$39,970 from last year's \$1,833,524.

**Federal Funds:** The proposed budget of \$46,388 projects a \$5,074 (9.9%) decrease from last year's \$52,462. Ms. King pointed out that they won't know the actual value for REAP Small Schools until September but they anticipate a \$1,000 decrease.

**School Population:** The current Georgetown Central population is 89 students, 8 of which are tuition students from Arrowsic. Next years population will be 89 students, 6 of which are from Arrowsic. Georgetown projects 47 tuition students in grades 7-12, the same total as this year.

**Staffing:** Current and proposed teacher staffing are the same, 9.5 full time equivalent (FTE) teachers. The budget proposes 2.5 FTE Ed Techs, the same number as current. Ms. King pointed out that One Ed Tech is being shifted from pre-K to K-2 which relocates costs within the budget detail breakdown. The only other

change to staffing is increasing of Custodian hours from 38/week to 39/week.

**Regular Instruction:** The proposed budget of \$1,048,181 projects a decrease of \$41,036 (3.8%) from the current \$1,089,217. Ms. King pointed out that this decrease is primarily due to shifting of the Ed Tech and extension of a teacher sabbatical.

**Student/Staff Support:** The proposed budget of \$155,801 projects an increase of \$10,001 (6.9%) from the current \$145,800. Ms. King pointed out that this includes substantial salary increases for Guidance, Librarian and Instructional Technology, each of which was misplaced on the contractual salary scale. It also includes a \$2,000 increase for books/periodicals, catching up on cuts in the past few years.

**System Administration:** The proposed budget of \$73,230 projects an increase of \$16,654 (29%) from the current \$56,576. Ms. King pointed out that this includes a share of the AOS 98 Curriculum Coordinator, whose cost was previously covered entirely by Boothbay. It is now being allocated across all schools in the district based on student population.

**Facilities and Plant Operations:** The proposed budget of \$176,730 projects an increase of \$7,424 increase from the current \$169,306. Ms. King explained that this includes salary increases plus an additional hour per week for the custodian (increase of \$2,561), a contract with Honeywell which will cover all maintenance costs for the heating system (increase of \$3,500), a one-time expense for some new equipment (floor polisher, weed wacker, and sweeper – increase of \$4,500). There is also a projected decrease of \$5,000 for fuel based on the contract negotiated for this year.

**All Other/Food Service:** The proposed budget of \$75,853 projects an increase of \$45,178 (147%) from the current \$30,675. This increase is due to three separate items. Food service projects an increase of \$4,880, primarily due to an anticipated \$3,500 decrease in State subsidy. The budget also anticipates that half of the Teacher Retirement Costs, \$20,297, will be shifted from State to Local funding – as proposed by the Governor. A one-time expense of \$20,000 is also proposed for security upgrades to the school, specifically to address the type of issues raised after the Newtown, CT incident last December. Upgrades will include door locks, buzzers and video cameras and monitors.

#### COMMENTS, QUESTIONS, & RESPONSES:

At completion of the presentation, Ms. King asked if there were questions and/or comments. She responded to most but not all. The pace of discussion was very fast and my notes are not 100% complete. In my judgement, the following items were most significant.

**Tuition Students:** Question – What is the cost (to the Town) of tuition students going to schools other than RSU 1?

Response - The Town pays the RSU 1 rate. If tuition at another school is higher, it is parent's responsibility to pay the difference.

**New Special Needs Students:** Question – How do you (superintendent) estimate/plan for new special needs students? Note: This question was raised because of the late-breaking addition to the Special Ed budget.

Response – We don't. When notified that there is a new student with special needs, we research the requirements (for that student) and project those anticipated costs into the budget.

**Per Capita Spending and Student Performance:** A member of the public summarized statistical data he had recently researched. The state average cost per student is approximately \$9,000. Georgetown Central School cost is approximately double that. Question – How do you explain the per capita cost being so high while the school performance (based on the recent school report card) is below average?

Response (cost issue) - Ms. King indicated that the high cost per student is primarily driven by it being a small school, many of the costs are fixed regardless of school population. There was a follow up question/discussion of cost in Georgetown compared to other AOS 98 schools. Ms. King indicated that cost per student varies by school, Georgetown being the highest (in AOS 98). She did not have specific figures readily available but can provide them. She noted that Edgecomb is approximately the same number of students as Georgetown.

Response (school report card issue) – Mr. Carlson addressed the school report card issue, using presentation material, including the actual state report, that he had prepared in case the issue was raised. He reviewed the data on the report card, showing exactly what number/percentage of students (who were tested last year) were deemed below satisfactory in math and reading. 18 students were unsatisfactory in math; 67% of those are special ed students. 13 students were unsatisfactory in reading; 76% of those are special ed students. He also indicated that 41% of Georgetown School students are eligible for free lunch. Studies have demonstrated that disadvantaged students (as measured by the lunch program) correlate statistically to unsatisfactory ratings on these tests.

Discussion – Mr. Carlson's presentation/data led to a discussion of what actions the school is taking to respond to the rating. Both Ms. King and Mr. Carlson agreed that the focus is on understanding specifically what the data means and focusing on steps they can take to improve student performance. They have had a number of meetings with the staff to address these issues.

Follow-up Question – Does Georgetown have a higher than average percentage of special ed students?

Response – Mr. Carlson said that the school, overall, is right on the state average. However, specific grade/students tested last year had a statistically higher than average percentage of special ed.

Follow-up Comment: Another member of the public indicated that he had researched the school report card issue for the entire state. According to his count there are 338 elementary schools that received A, B, or C grades – performed better than Georgetown.

**School Budget Cuts:** Comment - A parent indicated that he has been following the school budget for five years and “all we have had is cut, cut, cut.”

**School Needs:** Question to the School Committee – If we weren't restricted by funding, what additional item(s) would we put into the budget?

Response – A foreign language teacher.

**Administrative vs Instruction Costs:** Question – What is the percentage breakdown between administrative and instruction (teachers, ed techs, library/technology/guidance) and how does it compare with other schools in the state?

Response – Ms. King indicated that she does not have that data readily available.

**Regular Instruction vs Special Ed:** Question what is the percentage breakdown between regular instruction

and special education?

Response – Ms. King indicated that special education students have individual development plans and costs vary substantially by student.

Note: Special ed requirements are mandated by the State but all costs are paid by the local community. The superintendent and/or school committee have virtually no discretion in funding level for special ed.

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