

**WILTON-LYNDEBOROUGH COOPERATIVE
SCHOOL BOARD MEETING
Tuesday, October 29, 2024
Florence Rideout Elementary School
6:30 p.m.**

The videoconferencing link was published several places including on the meeting agenda. Online voice comment was not working. The audio was only going one-way.

Present: *Dennis Golding, John Zavgren, Michelle Alley, Tiffany Cloutier-Cabral, Darlene Anzalone, Geoffrey Allen (online with no voice option), Diane Foss, and Jon Lavoie*

Principal Tom Ronning, Director of Student Support Services Ned Pratt, Technology Director Nicholas Buroker, and Clerk Kristina Fowler

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Golding called the meeting to order at 6:32pm.

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

III. STUDENT/STAFF ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

There was no presentation.

IV. ADJUSTMENTS TO THE AGENDA

Chairman Golding requested in Ms. LaPlante's absence to move the YTD Reporting and Business Administrator's Report to the November 12 meeting and move the report from the Policy Committee to the November 12 as the last meeting could not be held. It was noted that online participants are unable to comment (audio only going one-way).

*A MOTION was made by Ms. Cloutier-Cabral and SECONDED by Ms. Foss to accept the adjustments to the agenda.
Voting: all aye, motion carried.*

V. PUBLIC COMMENTS

The public comment section of the agenda was read. There was no public present or online.

VI. BOARD CORRESPONDENCE

a. Reports

i. Business Administrator's Report

Moved to the November 12 meeting.

ii. Director of Student Support Services Report

Mr. Pratt reported along with his report, he included a SPED transportation review which was discussed at the Budget Committee meeting and SPED tuition analysis which will be discussed further down the road. His Board Report included the annual statistics that he provides in September or October. Our SPED rate is 22.6% and NH's is 19.67%. Initially we had 4 students in process and 4 students will be aging out at the end of the year. Those in process may or may not need services. We have 24 students in our RISE program and 19 ABA Therapists across the district. Looking at the first table, students with disability and SPED rate columns, focusing on the SPED Rate for those 3 years, LCS is coming down a little bit, FRES and MS have jumped back up, and the HS is increasing. Delving deeper into the data, he is finding that we are beginning to see the 2020 spread in the higher grades. We identified early on a lot of kids in preschool and at FRES. In discussions with other SPED Directors and the State SPED Director, the numbers are going up not down. The next chart shows the disability type, special learning disabilities in area of reading, math writing are going up. He spoke of having some discussions in the past regarding the "COVID effect" which makes sense with what we are seeing. The autism rate continued to climb as it does statewide and nationally. All other areas we are pretty much the same except for developmental disability that has dropped by 6%. It is an age specific disability and after the age of 9, you have to make some decisions where your child is going to go. In seeing that go down and one other that has gone up significantly is emotional disability. We are seeing the numbers jump from 7 to 10. All told, the district is performing around the state average, just a little higher. The identification process we continue to be very rigorous with in terms of making sure students are going through the process and making sure there is a disability and it is educationally related. It will be interesting to see over the next couple of years especially with the FRES bubble, if that will dissipate a little. Giving this report on September/October gives some relevance to the budget and type of student we are preparing for. A question was raised, going back 40 years in the past, you would probably come up with comparable data and not say this is outrageously high, is it possible to make these kinds of statements? Mr. Pratt responded that you could. With the onset of Special Education in the 1970's and rolling through the 80's and 90's, a lot of states were down around 8%

or 9% disability. A lot of states were restrictive in terms of what gets in the door regarding special education. A lot of the civil rights work has loosened that kind of fence so to speak or gate. The students were always there but it is how we navigated through without the law. A question was raised if he feels we have what we need for those identified this year and the coming year. Mr. Pratt responded the short answer is yes. Working through the budget last year with the Budget Committee and School Board we were able to pretty accurately predict our needs. An ongoing issue we still have is paraprofessionals and ABA/RBT's. We are finding some students need some 1:1 work, more than what we were doing. As you know we traded in 5 openings for 3 contracted service positions and we are starting to look to see if we will need 1 or 2 more paraprofessionals and are looking at resources if we need to do that but not ready to jump to that now. This is the time when referrals come in right after the 1st quarter. Kindergarteners jump to 1st grade and we tend to get a lot of referrals. We are cautiously optimistic but still concerned all the time. A question was raised how often outside paraprofessionals are being used. Mr. Pratt responded we currently have 3, we had already contracted for an ABA and paraprofessional and are continuing with those and are looking to see if we need additional resources. It would be so much easier if we could hire for the openings we have but we are just not getting the applicants. We had one applicant the other day who didn't know what they were applying for. We have one agency that has been successful for us with reasonable prices. A question was raised what is pulling the candidates to go to an agency vs. coming directly to us. Mr. Pratt responded there are 2 factors, they are paid a higher rate and they offer insurance, which we do as well but it seems like they are being pulled that way. This is a relatively new part of the contracted services world, up until a couple of years ago they were not part of that and it was just positions such as Speech and Language, Occupational Therapy, BCBA's etc. The larger districts are using so many and even some teachers at this point because of the shortages. We are happy to use local people but they are just not getting the applicants. Chairman Golding spoke that he understands why you wouldn't want to dip into the SPED capital reserve fund yet but 3 more students (tuition cost) with a budget that is high as it is now, thinks we should think about using it for at least 1 tuition. We didn't put any funds into it last year as it's at the cap we wanted. We will be talking about warrant articles later, we could put more money into it next year and thinks we probably should use it with 3 tuitions coming in at \$75,000 each. Mr. Pratt commented that he is not prepared to go fully into the SPED tuition tonight, however, you see is the best way to deal with it, he will work with the School Board and Budget Committee, this is the synopsis of what we are seeing with certain services. Looking at the possible tuitions for next year this is an ongoing analysis of students and what we are able and not able to provide in district. Remember the standard is we always have to provide a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. With a few of our students, that least restrictive environment may not be here with the programs we have in the district but it is too early to tell. However, you want to approach it, he is happy to work with you. It is tough to talk in open session about specifics, the long answer is yes, whatever way it works and the Budget Committee and School Board feel is best. Chairman Golding voiced, the money is there, we will also talk about potential SPED transportation on our end and if we are going to have another warrant article for that it will be a lot of money this year. We will talk about warrants later, SRO, SPED bus if we have those and the SPED budget, and not taking funds from the capital reserve fund, it's a lot of money. Mr. Pratt voiced that 1 residential placement is about \$300,000 if they come in at the beginning of the year. It is not a negative statement; it is just how it is. For one student, it can add up to about \$250,000-\$300,000. The one that happened a few years ago, that placement was reasonable at the time. He gave an example for 1 student we are paying for a residential day program, all of that student's services add up to about \$144,000 a year. If you were to kick into a 365 days, you are seeing the price. However, you want to approach it, he is always going to be concerned about the person walking through the door that needs those services and if we don't have the money, then we will have to go back to the town if we can't figure it out. A question was raised that he has 3 potential out of districts, how sure are you about those happening. Mr. Pratt responded the students we are looking at we have been charting, meeting and testing for a period of time. If he had to guess today, because it would be a guess, it would be maybe 1 of the tuitions wouldn't be an immediate need from July 1, the other 2 could definitely be an immediate from July 1. He wants to caution the Board, these processes take us all over the place. Hypothetically, you could have a student not doing well, parents feel like they are not doing well, they have an advocate and lawyer on the case, we are now off the meeting and not doing any mediation's and then all of a sudden something clicks and everything is fine. On the flip side, you can have a student who is making progress and then just falls off the cliff. It is so hard to tell you definitively. He was asked how short are we in terms of being able to keep students like this in the district, is it a matter of a being short a couple of staff or no matter what we did we would not be able to help the student in district. Mr. Pratt spoke that it would be a bigger discussion with administration and then the Board. We are seeing that although we would love to look at opening programs here; with being a small cohort the needs of some are so specialized if we lump them into a program it will not have any core to it. Things from trauma that affects them in the classroom to a student that is severely autistic, those are not in the same program. We build programs to keep students in district, not the ones going out. It takes about 2 years to get DOE program approvals. These are conversations we have all the time, do we see a cohort forming. Right now, we do not have a definitive. It is an ongoing process. It was noted, it is good that his team is looking at this. When people who are not directly related to what needs to be done for our students, it probably just looks like a bunch of money and what are we going to do about it. It is nice to know that one of the reasons we are seeing larger numbers like that is that it is just not easy to pull things together in a district the size of ours. Mr. Pratt commented that when he came here the RISE program was not approved for HS programing; we had to go through that, it is looks different in the HS from the MS and the biggest is transition. A lot of it is shadowing it is a process. Discussion continued including that these numbers look like extenuating circumstances and the need to get grant funding. A question was raised, that we don't know how much we will get (grant) and does it go up by percentage every year? Mr. Pratt confirms the tuitions have nothing to do with grant funding. He asked for clarification on which grant funds are being referred to. It was confirmed IDEA grant funds. Mr. Pratt confirms tuitions come from local money. A question was raised if there are any grant

funds that the district or families can apply for this. It was requested that Mr. Pratt look into this. It was noted how is a small town supposed to do this without any help. Mr. Pratt confirms we do submit tuitions through SPED Aid which reimburses us money after a deductible (state takes the deductible). For example, a \$125,000 in transportation fees the state may take \$55,000 for the deductible and the remaining \$45,000 we are paid a certain percentage of this the following year so there is money there. He confirms it does go up and down, and each year the state increases the deductible they keep. Transportation cost goes up every year, the bottom line is we submit SPED Aid in July and they let us know over a period of time how much we will get back. IDEA is a year to year grant and we don't know what will happen with that, we are trying to keep that grant fluid for situations if need be as an example we share some of the money with High Mowing, it is the proportionate share. Their share went way up this year as they had more students and the amount we have is less. The SPED tuition analysis is to present to you what the costs were and what the projected costs will be for next year. A question was raised what would be the reason for not using the capital reserve fund. Mr. Pratt confirms the tuitions are potential and the Board can use the capital reserve fund for whatever they want, by Board vote. The concern is after the budget has been set if a student comes in and needs a residential or heavy duty services and it exceeds or comes close to exceeding the amount in the fund (currently \$300,000) then you would not have any money left and he guesses the next step would be going back to the towns. It is getting more expensive for a residential placement. It was noted he is asking for \$678,000 from the town and essentially, you may not need it. What happens to the funds if they are not used? Mr. Pratt responded the reason he is asking for \$678,000 on the initial proposal is our feeling working with some students that the least restrictive environment may not be in district that is why. He was asked what happens if it is not used. Chairman Golding confirms if it is in the budget, it goes back to the taxpayers and if it is in the SPED capital reserve account it stays there. A question was raised how the \$300,000 was raised. Chairman Golding confirms it was raised through a warrant article. He explained Mr. Pratt is leery because 3 or 4 years ago we had a student come in with a cost of about \$180,000 and we had about \$250,000 in the capital reserve fund so immediately it dropped. It was a little scary and he understand his worry. Mr. Pratt added all those questions are great questions; it is complicated and has a lot of moving parts. Chairman Golding noted it is still early in the budget process and there could be fluctuation all over the place.

VI. YTD REPORTING

Moved to the November 12 meeting.

VII. BUDGET DISCUSSION

i. FY 26 Warrant Articles

Chairman Golding noted without Ms. LaPlante here the numbers will be a little hard but there will be a facilities warrant article and possibly a SPED warrant article although we don't know about the (amount) facilities article yet. Ms. Cloutier-Cabral confirms the next meeting is November 4. Chairman Golding confirms the SPED capital reserve is at our goal amount of \$300,000 and we don't need to include it at this moment. He asked if there are any other warrant articles that anyone wants to discuss. Ms. Anzalone stated the SRO. Chairman Golding noted it would be hard to discuss without Ms. LaPlante present to provide the numbers. He asked Ms. Fowler to keep warrant articles on the agenda until it is finalized. She acknowledges this. Ms. Alley asked for an update on the locker rooms, is there a plan; it has been ongoing for a longtime. Ms. Cloutier-Cabral responded at the last Facilities Committee meeting, Mr. Erb let us know it is getting bigger financially than our funding for the project. The next meeting we will be looking at the blue print we were provided and how can we pare that down. Our goal is to make it ADA compliant and rehab it to make it useful. She will report out at the next Board meeting and we should have a lot more information. Ms. Anzalone asked about the lights and sound that the WLC Performance Committee spoke to us about and she notes she is not proposing this but asked, if anyone had proposed it or are we going to try to get that into the budget. We should get that into the budget if that is what we want to do. Chairman Golding noted it is a good question, and asks Ms. Alley as the Budget Committee liaison to bring that up to the Budget Committee. He asked for any other discussion. None heard.

VIII. ACTION ITEMS

a. Approve Minutes of Previous Meeting

A MOTION was made by Ms. Foss and SECONDED by Ms. Alley to approve the minutes of October 8, 2024 as written.

Voting: all aye, motion carried.

IX. COMMITTEE REPORTS

i. Budget Liaison

Ms. Alley reports we talked about the technology budget, the administration budget, the food services budget and the SPED transportation budget, which was the main focus. She notes we have a document in our packet. We didn't come to any conclusion it was a good discussion. Mr. Pratt spoke about transportation for students and whether or not it was wise to purchase buses. Mr. Ryan had questioned what are the rules when a student needs extra help (SPED services) and is there a cap for these students coming in. It sounded like he wanted the Board to discuss it at some point and look at the rules. Chairman Golding responded that he believes are hands are tied once they come in, he asked Mr. Pratt to confirm. Mr. Pratt added in terms of SPED transportation, yes if it is determined, they need to go on the bus then they need to. One of the concerns we had is our van seats 15 students and we are at 13 and 12. Another bus would be about \$80,000. The good news is all SPED case managers look carefully at the need for a student to ride a SPED bus. More and more parents are understanding

that just because they have a SPED disability, for some kids riding the regular bus is a highlight. A school bus is also the least restrictive environment; we shouldn't be putting kids on the SPED buses who don't need it. The scrutiny is there and we would not put kids on a SPED bus who don't need it. He is hopeful we don't get an influx of kids needing a bus it will cost us and there are some alternatives to that. The long answer to the question is yes. It was noted the Budget Committee's minutes are published.

ii. Policy Committee

Moved to the November 12 meeting.

X. PUBLIC COMMENTS

There was no public present or online.

XI. SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

Ms. Cloutier-Cabral commented it was a nice, fast meeting, thank you for all your work and contributions.

Mr. Lavoie commented he has been going to the soccer games, the kids are playing really well. The boys are in the playoffs, the girls didn't make it. The boys are at Hinsdale tomorrow, good luck to them.

XII. NON-PUBLIC SESSION RSA 91-A: 3 II (C)

A MOTION was made by Mr. Lavoie and SECONDED by Ms. Foss to enter Non-Public Session to review the non-public minutes, from October 8, 2024, RSA 91-A: 3 II (C) at 7:14pm.

Voting: via roll call vote, all aye, motion carried.

RETURN TO PUBLIC SESSION

The Board entered public session at 7:18pm.

XIII. ADJOURNMENT

A MOTION was made by Mr. Lavoie and SECONDED by Ms. Alley to adjourn the Board meeting at 7:18pm.

Voting: all aye, motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristina Fowler