

*****DRAFT*****

Timberlane Regional School District Budget Committee
Atkinson, Danville, Plaistow, and Sandown

Regular Meeting
March 10, 2008
7:10 p.m.

SAU 55
Plaistow, New Hampshire

Call to Order:

Mr. Balanoff called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m.; attendance was taken.

Roll Call:

Present: Mrs. Zerba, Mrs. Suech, Mr. Mullen, Mrs. O'Neil, Mrs. Lambert, Mrs. Quigley (7:35pm), Mr. Balanoff, Mrs. Winn and Mr. Mascola.

Absent: Mrs. Collie

Others Present:

Superintendent LaSalle, Elementary Director Mrs. Ralph, Director of Pupil Personnel Mrs. Lovett, and the following School Board Members Mrs. Champey, Mr. Brown, Mr. Paone, Mr. Collins, and Mrs. Withee.

Mr. Balanoff announced he has a few housekeeping things to discuss before attending to the agenda items. Mr. Balanoff stated that emails between Committee Members can be informational in nature, i.e. notice of a meeting etc., but not to hold discussions until the actual meeting. Additionally if you are requesting information as a Board Member, they need to go through the Chairperson and not directly to District Staff. Also the Board needs to act together and not do anything individually as a Committee Member. Mr. Mullen stated his request to Kathy Smith for the minutes of the last meeting was as a private citizen not as a Budget Committee member. The Committee needs to work together and maintain a professional open communication. Mr. Balanoff stated he noticed Mr. Mullen's website and read an excerpt that stated that *"For the rest of the meeting, we talked about roles and responsibilities. You could tell the committee was made up of parents at this point because the discussion became emotional -- people wanting to help make the school better without knowing exactly how to solve the problems facing the school."* Mr. Balanoff stated he has been on the Budget Committee for years and he did feel as though they knew what they were doing. As of the last meeting, the 2009 Budget Session had been complete and the committee members were venting. Mr. Mullen stated that as a new member he was expecting a regimented meeting and process which was not what he found at the last meeting. Mr. Balanoff also stated that the Committee members have ample opportunity to ask questions during the Budget process starting in the fall, after the Administration brings the initial budget requests to the Budget Committee. Mr. Balanoff stated that Budget Committee exists because the School Board, in accordance with RSA 32:14 voted to enact a Budget Committee and they could just as easily reverse their decision. Mr. Balanoff explained the upcoming TTA contract is negotiated with the School Board and not the responsibility of the Budget Committee. He continued on that we need to keep our role and responsibilities as advisors to the School Board clear. So with all that said, all emails between Committee members will "cc" all other members so no one person is acting alone.

Mr. Balanoff then stated the Budget Committee doesn't actually prepare the budget as it states in the By-Laws, but we do review it. Mr. Mullen asked if we as a Committee negotiated with the School Board to not prepare the budget, as it states in our by-laws, in exchange for being allowed to exist. Mr. LaSalle answered that physically the Budget Committee doesn't prepare the Budget because it is an Administrative function, but legally speaking, every part of the Budget is presented to the Budget Committee and reviewed during the budget process, therefore, the Budget Committee is in fact "preparing the budget".

Mr. LaSalle stated that the School Board Members are fortunate in that they have an association which provides training to School Board Members and many of the same rules apply to both School Board Members and Budget Committee members especially regarding emailing. Additionally Mr. LaSalle stated that once a vote is taken, there is only a single will of the Committee and all members should support that decision.

Mrs. Zerba questioned whether Mr. Mullen's website isn't a conflict of interest where it is his own venue but he is supposed to be a Committee Member. Mr. Balanoff stated that there isn't anything the Budget Committee could do about Mr. Mullen having his own website. Mr. Mullen stated there are two separate areas of his website. One is specifically devoted to Budget Committee information that he is being careful not to put too much of his own opinion on and the other part which is more his own thoughts and opinions as well as links to other sites. He stated the goal of his website is to educate the public so that in three years there won't be an empty spot on the ballot for the Budget Committee. He wants to publish a less sanitized version of information. He stated videotaping the meetings and putting them on the web is a way to do this. Mrs. Suech stated she would prefer he only post the minutes and then direct all questions to the Budget Committee directly and not only to him on his website. Mrs. Quigley stated she strongly recommends the Budget Committee seek legal advice and she is very concerned about District Business and Budget Committee business being posted on a non-district website. Mrs. Winn stated she is concerned about the link by her name as well as her name and contact information being on Mr. Mullen's website and she would prefer people not contact her through that site but to go to the District Site. She requested as did many other Committee members that Mr. Mullen remove their email links and name/address information from his website.

Mr. LaSalle provided printed copies of various reports that he acquired from the State of NH Department of Education. This will help to answer some of the questions the Committee members had addressed in their letter to him. The first report is of Teacher Average Salary in Public School Districts for School Year 2006-2007. Mr. LaSalle stated the southern tier school districts are vastly different than the northern tier districts.

The second report is of Educational Attainment of Teachers in NH for public school, for school year 2006-2007. He noted that Timberlane has a higher percentage of teachers with advanced degrees than the state average and since we pay more for advanced degrees which can drive up costs. Mr. LaSalle stated that as a District, we are competitive for incoming teachers at the lower end of the pay scale, but not as competitive at the higher end of the pay scale. At the last contract negotiation, the lower level of the scale was the priority because we wanted to attract good people to replace the retiring staff. Mr. LaSalle stated that he is satisfied with this years recruitment effort to replace the larger than normal number of teachers who are retiring.

The third report shows the Average Class Size by District in Public Elementary Schools as of October 3, 2005. The class size in Timberlane is a little higher than the state average but there are some very small school districts in the state which drag down the state average.

The fourth report shows Cost per Pupil by District for 2006-2007. Overall Timberlane is spending a little less per pupil than the average. Mrs. Suech asked why we would want that to be the case. Mr. LaSalle stated that is a good question. For example in Hampstead the cost per pupil is much higher and the schools are recognized and honored for being extremely high performing schools. On the flip side just paying more per pupil is not the whole answer to performance. In Hampstead for example the Teachers are highly trained and well paid. The turnover rate there is extremely small. In addition the students themselves come to class highly motivated to learn, i.e. parental support. A highly motivated student in Timberlane does well. Even class size research shows both negative and positive results. The smaller class size in itself does not increase performance, but it does allow for better hands on curriculum and more engagement and interaction between students and teachers which does increase performance. The Timberlane curriculum is not bad. We have an aggressive five year plan but when you get into the second levels of education, the facilities do not allow for creative, modern programs. We are obligated to always keep costs as low as possible but to also pursue academic excellence. Mr. LaSalle stated that with the trend in the pupil population, he is anticipating cutting two teacher positions for next year; however that could change at any time depending upon new enrollments.

The fifth report is the State Average Cost per Pupil and Total Expenditures for 2006-2007.

The sixth report is the Estimated Expenditures of School Districts.

The seventh report is a comparison of Timberlane Expenditures to other School Districts in the area. The only drastically different district is Hampstead because they don't have a High School. They pay tuition to Pinkerton instead. Mr. LaSalle stated the higher the percentage is for instruction and the lower the percentage is in all other areas, the more efficient the District is. The cost of Special Education was discussed. Some aspects of Special Education that play into the costs are your identification rates, your population numbers and if you can establish a program in house to save on out of districts costs, in addition to how many students need out of district services. Mr. Balanoff stated he would like more information when the fall presentations are done to see how many students we have with severe problems and what the level of service we are required to provide for them.

The eighth report is the Equalized Valuation per Pupil for 2005-2006. This report clearly shows why the Town of Atkinson at a valuation of \$948,438 per pupil has much easier time raising money than Danville who has only \$487,879 valuation per pupil. Sandown and Danville just don't have the capacity to raise tax money as do towns like Atkinson. However, Mr. LaSalle stated, this is not a school issue but rather a tax issue. Mrs. O'Neil stated that in 1964 when the Timberlane's Articles of Agreement were voted on, the formula agreed to was 100% Average Daily Membership on Operating Expenses and 100% on Capital Expenses. This is something that can be changed by a 2/3 majority vote; to a formula that can soften the drastic swing in tax

rates for Danville and Sandown. To get this changed however would be very difficult since it would only benefit Danville and Sandown.

The ninth report presented by Mr. LaSalle is the No Child Left Behind Report Card which recaps much of the data already discussed but basically shows that Timberlane is average.

The 10th report presented by Mr. Stokingier shows the percentages of the budget spent by function for the last two years and for the upcoming year. Additionally Mr. Stokingier suggested that all Committee Members keep the Annual Report close at hand to help address questions they receive regarding everything from NECAP scores, to enrollment, to staff numbers and even the teacher salary schedule. Lastly Mr. Stokingier supplied a definition and description of Fund Accounting to help the Budget Committee members understand the financial system.

Mr. LaSalle stated that overall Timberlane is average in both cost and performance which is not where we want to be.

Mrs. Zerba asked the Administrators if the Budget Committee provides any real value to the School Board and Administration. Mr. LaSalle answered that he has a great respect for the democratic system of checks and balances and the Budget Committee certainly plays an important role in the Budgeting process and certainly brought the final proposed 2009 budget to a more conservative place. The process was slightly different than what was done in past years under Dr. MacDonald due to eliminating the “allocations” and going to a “needs based” budget, however the process the Budget Committee goes through is of great value to the voters of this district.

Mrs. Suech stated that as an Atkinson representative she did not see her role as necessarily to always cut the Budget, but rather as someone working to improve the district. Mr. LaSalle responded that she is correct in her description in so much that we need to spend the money we have, intelligently and for the long term improvement. Mr. LaSalle continued to explain some of the problems the district faces with the facilities currently and how it will become an even bigger problem over time.

Mr. Mullen describe that he feels most taxpayers believe the SAU has not always been upfront and he strongly recommends the Administration work towards winning people over because he does not see the past votes reflective of just a money issue. Mr. Mullen would like to see the District not do another big bond but rather set money aside in a Capital Reserve Fund for Future building projects. Mr. Mullen asked if the Administration has developed the cost of a contingency plan if the upcoming Teacher Contract is not approved. Mr. LaSalle stated that they are not even close to that point and he believes that business will carry on as usual through the negotiating process.

Mrs. Winn stated she would like to see the Community Relations Committee become very active in formalizing a public relations/marketing plan to promote the School District curriculum and facilities needs. Mr. LaSalle stated that at this time the District is in an Informational gathering mode and it is his opinion that the buildings we have built during the 1960's and 70's are of a lesser quality than something that was built in the 1930's.

Mr. Brown stated that the three members of the Community Relations Committee are present this evening and will be having their first meeting soon. The committee members are Mr. Mascola, Mr. Paone and Mr. Brown. They are anticipating becoming very active over the next year to help voters understand what the School District needs are. The discussion turned to how successful Mrs. Ralph was at getting the word out about Kindergarten and that certainly made a huge impact on the vote. Mrs. Ralph stated that the parent volunteers made a huge difference in getting information out to the voters and really advocating for kindergarten. The District can only supply information but not advocate for a particular vote. Mr. Mullen stated that tonight's meeting would have been a perfect time to record the meeting and make it available on streaming video to educate the public. Mrs. Withee who has served as both a Budget committee member and a School Board member stated that televised meetings do change how people act and respond during a meeting and it is not always a positive change.

Mr. Mullen asked if it was true that the School Board doesn't have to spend the money where it was approved by the voters. Mr. Stokinger stated that the Administration and the School Board pays very close attention to the intent of the monies, even though by law they can spend the money where they see fit, as long as it doesn't go over the approved bottom line. Mr. Mullen then queried if the School Board saw all Budget transfers? Mr. Stokinger responded that they see all major transfers. For example Hampstead needed to unexpectedly replace an aging van but it wasn't planned for in the Budget. Therefore the School Board was given the information regarding a Budget Transfer and they did in fact approve the transfer request and the van purchase. We do small transfers between supplies and equipment etc. without notifying the School Board. This is really just being frugal, especially this time of the year where small balances are sometimes combined to make a purchase. Mr. LaSalle explained that there will be less transfers beginning in the 2009 year because of the change to "needs based" budgeting as opposed to the allocations.

Mr. Mullen also asked that when the process begins in the fall, will the Committee members be what which increases are contractual and which are not? Mr. Stokinger stated that information is always provided each Budget season.

Mrs. Zerba brought up for discussion the phone calls she has been receiving from Atkinson residents who are very dissatisfied with the Timberlane High School and are looking to send their children to private schools. She is concerned that Atkinson voters have historically been very supportive but now she is afraid that might change if broad sweeping changes aren't undertaken to improve the test scores, SAT scores and college admission statistics. Mr. LaSalle stated this is the first time the High school age group was required to take the NECAP and that has to be taken into consideration. He finds it hard to believe that the elementary age kids and middle school age kids have always done well on the tests and then suddenly they test poorly at the High School level. He thinks the test scores are reflecting something other than a lack of academic performance. Mrs. Zerba continued that the "perception" the public has regarding Timberlane, is one of the biggest problems the District faces and it somehow needs to be changed. She also questioned the status on the Strategic Planning Committee because she has heard that there is some movement at the building levels, but no one who wants to serve on that committee from the Budget Committee has been contacted. Mr. LaSalle stated that there are

presently three subcommittees working with the consultant and collecting data. After the internal data collection and the physical audit of the facilities, which will take place this spring, then a focus group will be organized. This is when the volunteers will be called upon to participate in the planning. Mr. LaSalle stated that his first priority will be to affect change in the quality of education especially in the High School.

Mr. Mullen described the Elementary Schools as having problems that need to be addressed as well as the High School. He stated that many days his kids come home from school stating the math teacher was away or they watched the Red Sox game on TV instead of teaching actual class work.

Mrs. Lambert brought up for discussion the quality of the teachers. Mr. LaSalle stated that most of the staff appears to him to be well trained but worn down and frustrated. This is one reason he wants to go to block scheduling to reduce the number of students a teacher is responsible for. We do some chasing of lazy teaching but that is not the norm in his view but rather most of our teachers want to do their job well, but are overwhelmed with the current situation.

The Timberlane Administrators and all School Board Members except Mr. Paone left the meeting at this time and the Budget Committee continued the meeting.

Mrs. Suech made a motion and was seconded by Mrs. Zerba, to accept the minutes of the March 27, 2008 Organizational Meeting.

Vote: Unanimous.

Mrs. Winn made a motion and was seconded by Mrs. Suech, to accept the minutes of the March 27, 2008 Regular Meeting.

Vote: Unanimous.

Mr. Mascola reported that the School Board discussed at their last meeting, the request to record and televise the Budget Committee Meetings. The School Board was in agreement that only the fall Budget Presentations by Administrators should be recorded.

The Board discussed an invitation by the Sandown Selectmen to a meeting to discuss the proposed changes to the State School funding formula. Mrs. Winn stated she would be attending this meeting.

Mrs. O'Neil requested the next meeting on September 11, 2008 be one of the facilities tours that take place in the fall. Mr. Stokinger stated he would ask the Facilities Committee to see if this could be arranged. Mrs. Winn asked if the most important parts of this tour be recorded and shown on the TEN channel, in addition to possibly opening up the facilities tours to the public.

Under Other Business Mr. Mascola asked why the annual payroll for all District employees is not printed in the Annual Report. Mr. Stokinger replied it has just always been done in Hampstead and not done in Timberlane. The list for Timberlane employees would be very long but it is possible to include it. Mr. Mascola stated he would bring it up at the next School Board meeting.

Mr. Mullen asked if he could attend the Technology Committee meetings. It was explained that all meetings are open to the public and he can attend any he is interested in. He would not have a vote unless he was assigned to that committee as a Budget Committee representative.

Mr. Paone stated he was assigned as the alternate to Mr. Mascola for Budget Committee and he would like to be copied on all Committee emails to keep up in case Mr. Mascola needs to miss a Budget meeting.

A general discussion of the perceived problems continued on for a few minutes.

The meeting adjourned at 10:10 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Kathy Smith
Recording Secretary

Unapproved Minutes