

Marlborough Board of Education

Special Meeting

August 15, 2016

Elmer Thienes-Mary Hall Elementary School Library/Media Center

1. Call to Order

Chairman Ruth Kelly called the meeting to order at 6:33pm.

BOE Members Present:

Present and seated were Ruth Kelly, Betty O'Brien, Wes Skorksi, Louise Concodello, Theresa Brysgel, Dr. Judithe Kaplan, Mimi LaPoint and Patrick Pabouet.

Susan Rapelye recused herself because of a conflict of interest and did not attend this meeting.

Administration Present:

Dr. David Sklarz, Superintendent

Dan White, Principal

Kim Kelley, Vice Principal

2. Pledge of Allegiance

3. Public Comments

Kristin McLaughlin, 12 High Meadow Road, said she is 100% in favor of adding a fourth kindergarten class because she feels 20 children per kindergarten class is too many.

David Porteous, 15 Edstrom Road, suggested that the Board adhere to its class size guidelines and hire another teacher.

Lindsey Mark, 261 Jones Hollow Road, cited a Tennessee study which supports the belief that lower class size benefits children and teacher alike and lead to a better educational experience.

Erin Hatzikostas, 52 Williamsburg Road, supports smaller class sizes and said that everyone is aware of the benefits of smaller classes.

Larry Prior, 421 Jones Hollow Road, commented that class size when he was growing up was between 25-30 and noted that this larger size seemed to have little impact. He commented that

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if a limit is going to be set for the number of students per class, then there should be hard data to support that number that shows the possible impacts. Mr. Prior noted the other resources that are also available to students in the classroom in addition to the teacher.

Carina Ramos, 191 Flood Road, commented that she is a teacher and has experienced herself the positive impact smaller class sizes have on the students. She commented that when her current second grader was in kindergarten, there were four classes of approximately 15-16 students per class. She commented that her kindergartner was able to read by the end of the year and attributed this to the smaller class sizes available. She commented that she hopes smaller class sizes continue.

4. Report from Administration on Kindergarten Enrollment as of August 15, 2016

Dr. Sklarz noted that the focus of the meeting is to discuss the current kindergarten enrollment number of 61 students and the one class that will have one student over the recommended guideline of 20 students, if an additional section is not added. Dr. Sklarz noted that class size will be on the agenda for further review and discussion at the August 25, 2016, regular meeting.

Ms. Concedello noted the current class size guidelines as follows:

K-1	16-20
2-4	18-23
5-6	20-25

Ms. Brysgel commented that there are some unknown factors that could potentially impact the classroom, including the number of students with special needs. Dr. Sklarz commented that they did review the kindergarten class structures from the past five years and he noted that this incoming kindergarten class does not stand out as significantly different from the classes of previous years. He noted that 59/61 kindergarten students have a preschool background. Ms. Brysgel commented that she feels even twenty students is too many students per class for kindergarten and noted her concern that they were now going above 20 students, even if it is only in one class. Ms. Brysgel asked if the Board has the ability to go back to the Board of Finance and to request additional funds. Dr. Sklarz noted that the Board does have that ability.

Wes Skorski noted that in April, 2016, the Board of Finance cut the Board of Education budget by \$200k and he reviewed the cuts that were made in the budget to get to that number, commenting that the teacher position that was cut was just one piece of those cuts. Mr. Skorski commented that he feels that the budget was cut to its bare bones and questioned where cuts would be now made if the teacher position is added back in. Mr. Skorski also noted that there will be a full-time paraprofessional in the kindergarten classroom, allowing for two full-time people to be working with the students. Mr. Skorski thanked the public for coming out

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tonight, but commented that their comments would have been helpful in April at the Board of Finance meetings when these cuts were being made.

Ms. LaPoint commented that prior to April, the Board agreed and voted to have an additional teacher for educational purposes. She understands that the budget was cut, but does not feel that the teacher should be cut. She commented that the Board's role is to provide a quality education to the students in the Town and feels that they should go back to the Board of Finance for the funds to support that teacher.

Ms. O'Brien commented that she wants to ensure that parents understand that she feels that their student's education will not be harmed if an additional teacher is not approved. Ms. O'Brien commented that these are recommended guidelines, but not an absolute. She noted that years ago there was a kindergarten group with very small class sizes, but she noted that it was a half day kindergarten program. She commented that the full day kindergarten program is offering students twice the amount of time in school than they had in the past. Ms. O'Brien also noted that students with special needs have a paraprofessional supporting them in the classroom.

Ms. Concodello questioned if the Administration has looked into where they would cut. Dr. Sklarz did not share specific data regarding potential cuts in the budget if an additional teacher is approved. Dr. Sklarz noted that approximately \$221k was cut from the budget because the Board of Education budget absorbed AHM. He commented that any potential cut would impact the school and the students.

Ruth Kelly commented that she feels the school has excellent kindergarten teachers and experienced paraprofessionals, in addition to outside support when needed. She commented that she is comfortable with maintaining the structure in place at this time.

Dr. Judithe Kaplan questioned if there has been a feedback shared by the current kindergarten teachers. There was no direct feedback from the teachers shared.

Mr. Pabouet commented that he does not feel that one additional student will have a big impact.

Dr. Sklarz noted that it is important to focus on ensuring that no harm will be done to the students when making this type of decision. He noted that 90% of the students entering kindergarten in the Fall have preschool experience. He noted that the current teachers in place for kindergarten are quality teachers that he feels can handle an additional student. He noted the various support provided in the classroom in addition to the teacher. Dr. Sklarz noted that if the Board votes to add an additional teacher, then the paraprofessional support will be reduced.

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Betty O'Brien made a motion that that Board keep the kindergarten class configuration as it was originally budgeted for: three teachers and three full-time paraprofessionals. The motion was seconded by Louise Concodello.

Discussion:

Ms. Brysgel commented that class size is an important component of education and commented that she feels that kindergarten students would have a better experience in a classroom of 16 students.

Wes Skorski commented that while he agrees with Ms. Brysgel, he is unsure how they would fund it.

Louise Concodello, Dr. Judithe Kaplan, Ruth Kelly, Betty O'Brien and Patrick Pabouet were in favor of the motion. Theresa Brysgel, Mimi LaPoint and Wes Skorski were opposed. The motion carried.

5. Public Comments

Cliff Denniss, Board of Finance, commented that he reviewed the Charter and outlined what he believes is the process that the Board of Education would need to follow in order to get funds restored. Mr. Denniss recommended that the Board work with legal representation.

Larry Prior, 421 Jones Hollow Road, requested that the Board of Education meetings be placed on the Town Calendar. He noted that he did not see the meeting posted.

David Porteous, 15 Edstrom Road, commented that he is disappointed by the Board's decision and cautioned the public to pay attention to educational issues and funding if they want to ensure that the schools remain at the highest level.

Ken Hjulstrom, 181 South Main Street expressed concern regarding building maintenance and the need for the Board of Education to find funds to make necessary repairs.

6. Adjournment

Louise Concodello made a motion to adjourn meeting at 7:28pm. The motion was seconded by Dr. Judithe Kaplan and carried by a unanimous vote.

Respectfully submitted
Karen DeCorleto