

**ST. GEORGE MUNICIPAL SCHOOL UNIT  
SCHOOL BOARD  
BUDGET WORKSHOP MINUTES  
Tuesday, March 2, 2021**

The budget workshop was called to order at 6:30 p.m. with board members Jennifer Garrett, Alane Kennedy, Shasta Minery, Kristin Falla and Emily Chadwick present, all of whom attended remotely. Also present at the meeting were Superintendent Michael Felton, Instructional Administrator Adam Bullard, Business Manager Cassie Kilbride, Beth Giggey, Jessica Berry, Amy Hufnagel, Meghan Smith, Kalyn Grover and Alexis Pine, all of whom attended remotely except Mr. Felton.

**Public Comment:** None.

**Adjustments to the Agenda:** None.

**Presentation:** Jessica Berry gave a Power Point overview of the school's special education program. She showed the trends of special needs in the school compared to the state and nationally. Maine, she said, has the highest rate of children diagnosed with anxiety and the third highest diagnosed with depression. She showed the composition of the school's programs with the number of students in each, with a total of 33 students in K-8 special education, and the caseloads in March of this year compared with the caseloads in September of last year. She showed the building blocks for healthy development, school readiness, mindsets for self and school, perseverance, and independence and sustainability and said she is using a framework that is research-based. She said she wants to change the odds rather than asking students to beat the odds. She said ARC provides flexibility, goal setting, and a focus on relationships and she reviewed the trauma-informed approaches. Amy Hufnagel said ARC provides a way for students to stay regulated. She said many of them can become dysregulated and intense staffing allows for multiple ways throughout the day to practice regularity. She said the needs of these students are high and ARC can meet them so that they can be in a classroom and it also provides life skills for the future. She said it serves students in the moment but also for the longer term. Dr. Berry said the students were surveyed about how the ARC program helped them and the survey showed that the program made the students feel connected and cared about and happier. Students also reported that the ARC program helped them with, among other things, math, dealing with anger, making friends, and listening. Dr. Berry said these students are often hesitant to express their emotions and so she was amazed when she received the answers to the survey. She said she also got thankful and appreciative feedback from parents and said the collaboration with parents has been good. She said the first goal of the program is to increase student wellness and engagement and to determine how the school can continue to help more students. The second goal, she said, is to build staff competency and the school's capacity to support trauma-impacted students and wellness as a whole. Lastly, Dr. Berry reviewed the national suicide rates for children and teens which have risen over the last five years. She said some of the approaches she has shared could have a beneficial impact with respect to this.

Chairperson Garrett asked what accounts for the increase of students in Maine being diagnosed as special needs students. Dr. Berry said there are many factors, some of which are opioid addiction, poverty, family dynamics, and genetics. She said she doesn't see this improving soon and there needs to be access to mental health support. Chairperson Garrett said Dr. Berry and the staff should be commended for their work. Mr. Felton said Kalen Grover was an ed tech last year and is a life skills teacher this year. He said Alexis Pine is in her first year as an ed tech, especially working on the day treatment side of the program. He said both of these young women should be commended. Dr. Berry was thanked for her presentation.

**FY22 Budget Overview:** Mr. Felton presented an overview of the FY22 budget with a description of what the school is and what it is trying to do; that is, focusing on excellence, community, and engagement. He displayed a note from a grateful parent and one from the principal of Oceanside High School who said a teacher at the high school was impressed with how much St. George students knew. He also showed a

video of students expressing what they liked about the school. Mr. Felton said six years ago the MSU didn't exist and now it has students who can articulate what is good about it. He then showed how the school allocates resources to programs through the budget process in order to achieve its goals. He reviewed the projected revenues for FY22 consisting of the state subsidy, federal funding, fund balance, MaineCare reimbursement, interest, and the amount locally raised which was 85% of the revenue this year (FY21) and 86% in the proposed budget for next year (FY22). He reviewed the accounting for Title 1 expenditures and federal ESEA revenues, as well as the accounting for special education tuition and federal local entitlement revenues. He said the school is required to account differently this year for all federal, ESEA and Local Entitlement revenues and the expenditures covered by this federal money.

Mr. Felton showed a proposed warrant article summary and the proposed FY22 budget allocation by percentages, with Articles 1 (Instruction) and 2 (Special Education) taking up most of the budget (46% for Article 1 and 21% for Article 2). He then reviewed the articles as a percentage of the total budget compared to the state average and neighboring districts, which showed that more of the St. George budget goes toward Article 1 than many other districts. It also showed, he said, that St. George spends slightly more on transportation because of high school choice and that it spends less on facilities than other districts. He reviewed a chart which showed that St. George spends more per pupil than other districts, however, he noted that the state's per pupil expenditures do NOT account for debt service, major capital outlays, or transportation costs. This means that school construction costs and debt service on building projects are NOT included in the state's per pupil expenditure calculations. He compared the increasing budget amounts for Articles 1 and 2 over time. He said in FY20 money was invested in Article 2 (Special Education) to try to reduce the rate of cost increases, and, even though the number of students with more intense needs has increased, Article 2 has not increased as much as it had in past years. Mr. Felton then reviewed what is driving the increases in Article 1, which include salaries and benefits for teachers which have risen 7% and 13% respectively due to an additional 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher and step increases, and salaries and benefits for ed techs. He said the federal Small Rural School Achievement (SRSA) funds will be used to purchase EL curriculum supplies and the Second Step SEL curriculum supplies. He said a \$50,000 instructional reserve was established and he plans to ask the Board to authorize the use of \$9,000 of that reserve if needed. He said high school tuition remains relatively flat with more students projected to attend the Mid-Coast School of Technology next year.

Mr. Felton said the special education budget is up by 9% and he reviewed the increase in salaries and benefits for ed techs. He said he is proposing a transition from an assistant special education director/day treatment teacher to a separate full-time special education director and a separate full-time day treatment teacher, which would result in an increase in the amount of \$66,000. He said there is an increase in students with needs and in the severity of the needs and the intensive programs in the school require oversight. He said a special education director would take on the administrative work that Beth Giggey is doing now and Ms. Giggey would have more time allocated to working with Ms. Kilbride. He said he has been thinking about the school's administrative structure and noted that there are not a lot of districts that have all of the positions that St. George has. He said one thing that could be considered is his position as superintendent and whether his position should be a four-day position instead of a five-day position. He said he wants to make sure the school can continue to provide what the students need and be cost effective relative to the taxpayers. He said he also wants to make sure the school is being built in such a way that it is not dependent on any one person. He said he has seen in other districts the value of having a systematic and strong leadership structure. He said this is something for the School Board to consider. Also to be considered, he said, were Pre-K staffing and space; a part-time music teacher; multi-age classes; the ideal class size for grades K-2, 3-5 and 6-8; a high quality, cost effective and sustainable special education program; meeting the needs of all learners; career technical education; and the school building project

Chairperson Garrett asked why, compared to other schools, St. George is spending so much more on instruction. Mr. Felton said our region has the fastest growing special education costs than any other region in the state. Chairperson Garrett asked why student and staff support costs were less than other districts. Mr. Felton said he will discuss that at the next budget workshop. Kristin Falla asked if St. George will have fewer students going out of district because of the growth of its special education program. Mr. Felton said

students have been brought back to the school with the establishment of the Day Treatment, Life Skills, and – now – ARC programs and the school will have the capacity to meet the needs of more students requiring those services. He said he would rather spend money on having students here than spending it on out-of-district placement and the school has to have a program that works. This year, he said, he has spent substantially less time dealing with behaviors because students are having their needs met. Alane Kennedy asked Mr. Felton if there have been any requests to have out-of-district students come to St. George. Mr. Felton said there have not been any yet. He said he wants to build capacity to meet St. George students' needs and to build a program that will make other districts want to send their students to St. George. Dr. Berry said she wants the school to stay ahead of the curve, not have a reactive program, and potentially be able to open its doors to districts that are overrun with students with needs. Amy Hufnagel said you always want to meet your own students' needs first and then be able to accept students from other districts.

**Review Article 1 (Instruction):** Mr. Felton said the full salary and benefits of the Title 1 teacher are not included in Article 1 and a portion of those salary/benefits are accounted for separately because those costs are covered by the federal ESEA grant. He also did not include a music teacher in the budget. Ms. Kilbride said the amount of federal funding received by the school will not completely cover the Title 1 teacher. Mr. Felton said staff negotiations are ongoing so it is not known what the steps will be next year. He said he projected an increase because he believes there will be an increase. Chairperson Garrett asked about Pre-K. Mr. Felton said he is not planning for Pre-K next year. He said that in his opinion it will have to happen sooner rather than later but it is not in this budget. He said once social distancing is not required the modular could provide needed space. Ms. Kilbride said Adam Bullard applied for federal funds for math camp. Mr. Bullard said he made a request for \$19,000 but he doesn't have a time frame for a response. Mr. Felton shared that the amount budgeted for Herring Gut is down. He said Herring Gut is working with the ARC program and he has spoken to them about fundraising. Chairperson Garrett asked if there was a plan to contract with Blueberry Cove next year. Mr. Felton said he doesn't see it as being the same next year as it was this year. He said he is looking at finding a way for students to go to Blueberry Cove on a regular basis and with a more manageable schedule; i.e., less than an entire school day. He said it has been a beneficial relationship and would like it to continue; the school is very grateful to Blueberry Cove because without this program the school would not have had enough space for all middle level students to attend in-person instruction five-days per week. Ms. Falla asked about multi-age class supplies. Mr. Felton said that the K-2 team would like to continue the K-1 multi-age class. The 3-5 team is still discussing the 2/3 and 4/5 multi-age classes. Chairperson Garrett asked about the cost of Expeditionary Learning. Ms. Kilbride said she believes the cost is \$31,000 this year. Mr. Felton said the school has not received the actual contract back yet and budgeted \$34,000 and that figure can be adjusted.

Ms. Hufnagel said the Second Steps curriculum has two models. The K-5 curriculum, she said, is a one and done curriculum. She said teachers buy kits and there are online resources. With the middle level curriculum, she said, everything is on line and there is a license which attaches to the entire school. With respect to the pricing, she said, there is a discount if multiple years are purchased and it is something the School Board could consider. She said the 6-8 team has been implementing this with the help of Nell Houde and there are parts of the curriculum that can go from year to year. She said it is good for groups of students who are talkers and for ones who do not want to talk. Mr. Felton said he will be bringing three school fund requests to the next workshop, including for Promethean boards. Ms. Kennedy asked if the Promethean boards are mobile. Mr. Felton said they are static. Ms. Kennedy said having mobile units would be more beneficial if there is a need to move them around. Mr. Felton said he would look into that. He said the total increase in the proposed budget for Article 1 is 1.56% (if you include the costs of the Title 1 teacher covered by federal ESEA funds, then Article 1 is up 4%). Ms. Kennedy asked about the difference in the cost of equipment. Ms. Kilbride said she will provide information. Ms. Kennedy asked about field trips and how these would be handled with multi-age classes. Mr. Felton said the conversation is ongoing with multi-age classes and alternatives being assessed.

**Review Article 2 (Special Education):** Mr. Felton said positions have been moved around, the budget for teachers' salaries has gone down and the budget for ed techs' salaries has increased. Dr. Berry said the budget line for resource room, day treatment and life skills equipment went down because it has been spread out. She said one of the goals is to create a docket of information with respect to skills needed and to choose a specific curriculum and strategy that would be more effective and evidenced based. She said the YMCA offers a program for children learning to swim and she would like to have St. George students participate. She said it would be a community trip and part of life skills. Mr. Felton said the amount budgeted for contracting for special education evaluations is up in the proposed FY22 budget. Chairperson Garrett asked if there is anyone on the school's staff who is able to do this. Mr. Felton said a lot has to happen outside of the school. Chairperson Garrett asked about occupational therapy. Dr. Berry said it is a goal to have occupational therapy integrated more and therefore there is a need to have more time with Chelsea Osgood. Ms. Hufnagel said providing services early on and having Ms. Osgood who is a Tier 1 interventionist can go a long way. Ms. Minery asked about Ms. Giggey moving her position over to help Ms. Kilbride. Mr. Felton said a full time special education director would do much of the special education administrative support that Ms. Giggey does now. He said more than half of Ms. Giggey's time would be spent on finance. He said she also helps with the high school choice process. He said the largest portion of her time has been spent on special education and that would shift to the special education director. Chairperson Garrett asked if the special education director would be the director for K-8 or K-12. Mr. Felton said every administrator in the school building has a unique role. He said he would want the director to be in the school building as much as possible and how this would work is something that would have to be negotiated. He said the total increase in the proposed budget for Article 2 is 2.49% (if the expenditures covered by federal Local Entitlement funds are included, then Article 2 is up 9%).

Chairperson Garrett asked if questions from School Board members should be emailed to Mr. Felton and Ms. Kilbride. Mr. Felton said they should and he will share answers to any questions from individual Board members at the next budget workshop. He noted that the proposed assessment increase is 5.78%. He said the assessment was flat last year and Ms. Kilbride and he will continue to work on how to lower the assessment figure. He said there will have to be a discussion on how to deal with fund balance and about the benefits and risks of using fund balance.

**Other:** None.

**Adjournment:** The workshop ended at 8:28 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Diane E. Speranza  
Recording Secretary