

**ST. GEORGE MUNICIPAL SCHOOL UNIT
SCHOOL BOARD
BUDGET WORKSHOP MINUTES
Tuesday, March 9, 2021**

The budget workshop was called to order at 6:31 p.m. with board members Jennifer Garrett, Alane Kennedy, Shasta Minery, and Kristin Falla present, all of whom attended remotely. Board member Emily Chadwick was absent. Also present at the meeting were Superintendent Michael Felton, Instructional Administrator Adam Bullard, Business Manager Cassie Kilbride, Jessica Berry, Meghan Smith, Kalyn Grover and Alexis Pine, all of whom attended remotely except Mr. Felton.

Public Comment: None.

Adjustments to the Agenda: Discussion of Superintendent's Position.

Kristin Falla said she would like to have a discussion about Michael Felton's suggestion at the last budget workshop that his position as superintendent might be reduced from a five-day-a-week position to a four-day-a-week position. She said that after thinking about the ramifications she does not believe that this is the right time for that change, especially during the pandemic. She said Mr. Felton works seven days a week now and has led the school through this difficult time. If this suggestion is to be pursued, she said, it can be considered again next year. Shasta Minery said she agrees with Ms. Falla. She said this is not the time to cut back on the superintendent's position. If there is a need to make cuts, she said, the school could look at other administrative positions, but the superintendent's position should be kept full time for now. Alane Kennedy said she would like to hear from Mr. Felton as to why he suggested the change; that is, was this based on a financial or a personal factor. Mr. Felton said he is looking at it through a systematic lens. He said he believed it made sense for special education to move away from the superintendent position. He said it is also for a financial reason in terms of not having too much administration. He said he wanted the school to have an administration that will stand the test of time and, if there is turnover, not disrupt the school. If looking in from the outside, he said, the question is why does the school need a five-day-a-week superintendent, and he believed that question needed to be answered. He said it is not typical for most superintendents to be involved in as many aspects of the school as he is. Ms. Kennedy said it would be good to have administrative responsibilities distributed in a way so as not to disrupt the school. She asked Mr. Felton how much of his time this would free up. Mr. Felton said for several years special education has taken up 50% or more of his time. He said he believes it would be possible to change to a four-day-a-week position but it would require a different approach as he does not like to do things half way. He said Ms. Kennedy has a point that a system should be built that is not about individuals but about the school. He said the one thing that makes him nervous is thinking about new programs and the building project. In other ways, he said, he feels more comfortable having Adam Bullard working with EL and Jessica Berry working with special education. Ms. Falla said she is comfortable with the proposal to have a full-time special education director and having Beth Giggey work more with Cassie Kilbride. Chairperson Garrett said that with the addition of new programs and the building project the school will need more of the superintendent's time, not less. Looking ahead, she said, Ms. Kilbride will get more help and Dr. Berry and Mr. Bullard are doing excellent jobs. Mr. Felton said Dr. Berry's and Mr. Bullard's positions will continue to grow and could get to a level where there would not be a need for a five-day-a-week superintendent. Ms. Minery said she believes this requires more discussion in the future, but not right now, and appreciates that Mr. Felton brought this to the board's attention.

Expenditures and Revenues/Review of Articles:

Mr. Felton reviewed the revenue sources, which included interest, use of fund balance, the anticipated state subsidy for special education costs, MaineCare reimbursement, and the amount to be locally raised.

He said the proposed increase in the local assessment is 4.9%. He said that in FY20 a large increase in the assessment was due to special education programs, that in FY21 the assessment was flat, and that in FY22 it will be up. He said if the increases were averaged starting with FY16, the average increase would be 3.67%.

Mr. Felton then reviewed expenditures and noted that 67% of the budget would be spent on Article 1 - Instruction (46%) and Article 2 – Special Education (21%). The largest increases in Articles 3 through 10 were in Article 8 – Transportation and Article 5 – Student & Staff Support.

He said Article 5 (Student & Staff Support), which was up by 7%, includes social work services, technology, assessments, library-media work, tuition reimbursement, professional development and travel, the school nurse, and 504 services. He said there were increases in staff salaries and benefits, conference travel, and software contracts for Emote, Infinite Campus, and Zoom. Mr. Felton said the state no longer subsidizes the school for Infinite Campus because it withdrew from RSU 13, but he said he has spoken to the Education Commissioner to try to get help with this. He said there were also increases in tuition reimbursement for teachers and ed techs and for technology hardware. Concerning technology hardware, he recommended using \$34,000 from Instructional Reserves for 80 devices for 6th-8th grade students and 13 devices for K-5 teachers. He said he hopes to get some funding from the state for the student devices.

Article 6 (System Administration), Mr. Felton said, is up 3% with increases for staff salaries and benefits, payroll services, time clocks, time clock software, and a fire resistant cabinet. Ms. Kilbride said time clock software is a one-time purchase, which would be used instead of time sheets and is more efficient. A fire resistant cabinet is needed, she said, because as the district gets older it collects more files and has to store them. Ms. Falla said the Town Office has a safe in which it stores records. Mr. Felton said that is something to consider. Chairperson Garrett asked about Covid funds that will be coming to the school and how such funds could be used. Mr. Felton said he doesn't have a sense of how much the school will get and the school will have to be strategic in how it is used. He said that if it is used to offset costs one year that will be in the budget every year it will be painful to add that cost back in the following years. He also said that some federal grants have to be used for items that are not budgeted.

Article 8 (Transportation), Mr. Felton said, is up by 7% and includes salary and benefits for a new van driver. He said he recommended taking \$17,000 from the Transportation Reserve to make the last lease payment on a bus. He said there is a student who may require out-of-district placement in a school that is some distance away and a full-time van driver would be required to transport the student. If it turns out that this is not needed, he said, the money will not have to be spent.

Article 9 (Facilities), Mr. Felton said, is up by 2%, with salaries and benefits going up and the budget for annual contracts going down. He recommended using \$70,000 from the Capital Reserve Fund for the remaining roof sections that require repair and are to be completed this summer. He said the next big section of roof repair would be in FY30. Mr. Felton said the budget for annual contracts include the rental of office space and phone and internet at 47 Main Street. Ms. Falla asked if renewing the rental of office space at 47 Main Street means it is anticipated that the school cannot be set up the way it was. Mr. Felton said Ms. Kilbride and he spoke and found it was hard to envision how to rearrange staff or put three people back in a room to make that happen, but added that he is open to suggestions. He said Ms. Kilbride and Ms. Giggey have the space they need at 47 Main Street and that space has worked very well this year, including as a space for meetings. If confidential conversations were being had, Mr. Felton said, two offices could not be found in the school to provide the necessary privacy. Ms. Minery asked Mr. Felton if he has spoken with Tim Polky about office space in the Town Office. Ms. Kilbride said she didn't know if people would be comfortable having confidential discussions there. Mr. Felton said he would speak to Mr. Polky, but in the past the Town Office said it did not have enough space for Superintendent and Business Manager offices. Ms. Minery asked about the use of the modular if the Main Street office is kept. Mr. Felton said the modular would be for classroom space next year and could eventually be set up for Pre-K. He said various options are being considered. Ms. Falla asked if it would free up space to bring Ms. Kilbride back to the school building. Mr. Felton said he will provide more information on that at the next workshop. Chairperson Garrett said if the Main Street office is meeting the needs of the school now she wouldn't wish to change it. Mr. Felton said the \$10,000 budgeted for school zone warning lights is for the installation of

two new warning lights. He said Paul Meinersmann has reached out to multiple people about the lights, the display in one of which is not working. Ms. Kilbride asked whether the lights were the school's responsibility or the Town's. Mr. Felton said he would speak to Tim Polky about this. Ms. Minery asked if he would also speak to Mr. Polky about putting warning lights on Elementary School Road. She said there are a lot of children, vehicles and school buses using the road. Mr. Felton said he would. Mr. Felton said the teachers are committed to having multi-age classes again next year as they knew it was a two-year proposition. After that, he said, K/1 and 2/3 classes will probably continue but there are more concerns with 4/5. However, he said, no one has come up with alternative ideas if classes are too large. Chairperson Garrett said she assumes the school will not be going back to classes involving more than 20 students next school year. Mr. Felton said that, based on the current DOE health and safety protocols, that is correct as students have to be spaced six feet apart and classes would have a maximum of about 15 students.

Article 16 (Food Service Transfer), Mr. Felton said, is up 52% or \$39,000, which is the amount of local money needed from taxpayers to invest in food service in order for the school to break even after applying sales revenue and federal and state reimbursements. He said there are increases in staff salaries and benefits and a decrease in projected revenues. He said food service revenues have been impacted by Covid, including breakfast sales down due to the late school start, loss of the cafeteria and salad bar, and the types of meals prepared for delivery to classrooms. Ms. Kilbride said the school's auditor told her this is the same in other nearby districts. She said next year the school will be operating in the National Food Program. Mr. Felton said the trend has been to ask for more local contribution and he doesn't see a solution. He said everyone in food service has been working very hard and the hope is that the students will be able to get back into the cafeteria, the very popular salad bar will come back, and revenue will go back up.

Mr. Felton then continued a discussion of questions and considerations raised at the last workshop, which included the following:

- Music teacher: Mr. Felton said he will speak with Kristin O'Neal to see if she could take on the role of music teacher.

- Additional occupational therapy: Mr. Felton said there is an increase in the need for occupational therapy (OT). Chairperson Garrett asked how the occupational therapist is paid. Mr. Felton said the school pays Maine Children's Collaboration Center and that organization pays its employee. Ms. Minery asked if an occupational therapist added to the staff would be under the teachers' contract. Mr. Felton said currently it would not. He said the cost for two and a half days a week is about \$45,000. To have a therapist full time, he said, the school would have to spend around another \$30,000. Ms. Minery said occupational therapy is very important and she would like to see the therapist working with younger children. Mr. Felton said Ms. Kilbride and he can work on the numbers to see what the impact would be on the budget. If it is looked at from a purely business and educational perspective, he said, the school could go to having a five-day-a-week therapist, but what holds him back is looking at it from the perspective of taxpayers. Ms. Kilbride said the cost of having a full-time therapist would also have to include benefits. Ms. Minery said she believes this is worth exploring.

- Career technical education (CTE) and new shop building: Mr. Felton said he has spoken with Robert Deetjen about bringing CTE and shop back to the school. He said Mr. Deetjen and he have discussed whether the Mid-Coast School of Technology could help provide a teacher and perhaps some equipment for the program. Mr. Felton said there are people in the community who are excited about doing this and the question is whether there are the resources to do it. Chairperson Garrett said she is enthusiastic about the possibility and asked about a timeline. Mr. Felton said if individuals who are interested make substantial contributions and the school can get a grant something could be built by the end of next summer or early next fall. He said the grand vision is that this would be the spearhead for fundraising for the whole school addition and renovations. He said he believes the future of education is the CTE model. Ms. Minery said she strongly supports this because she has seen the benefits of hands-on CTE programs in her family. She said the school should definitely move forward with this if there is community support.

- Percent of salary increases for non-aligned staff: Mr. Felton said he will be speaking with Ms. Kilbride about this.

Ms. Falla said she was concerned about the budget for afterschool supplies, conference travel in Article 5, including \$7,000 for an EL conference, and the budget in Article 9 for vocational transportation of students attending Lincoln Academy. As to the last, Mr. Felton said the school is charged for a portion of the cost of taking these students to the Bath Tech Center. Ms. Minery noted that the salary for the school secretary in Article 7 is down and asked why it is decreasing. Mr. Felton said he has had multiple conversations with Jan Letourneau and they believe her position could be less than the current 260 days. Ms. Minery asked what changed about the position. Mr. Felton said it was originally a 220-day position but was bumped up to 260 days. He said the position is needed during the school year but not for 260 days. He said it would be for the 180 days school is in session and it would be discussed how much was needed before the school year starts and after the school year ends. Ms. Falla asked about the budget for the substitute caller in Article 6. Ms. Kilbride said Melanie Knight arranges all of the substitutes for the teachers. Ms. Kennedy asked about the salary for the transportation director in Article 8. Ms. Kilbride said it is now a non-aligned position and is divided 50-50 between facilities and transportation. Ms. Falla asked about education leadership in Article 7. Ms. Kilbride said this is professional development for EL and is in place of a class. Mr. Felton said he will get more information on this. Ms. Falla asked if the school will use the new shed for storage. She said there is still off-site storage in the budget. Ms. Kilbride said the new shed is being used by staff. Mr. Felton said he would like to see some stored items come back to the school. He said the goal would be to not have two off-site storage units next year. Ms. Kilbride said they are used to house files and furniture removed from the school because of Covid requirements. Mr. Felton said it would be good to be able to scan files and not have hard copies. Ms. Kilbride said the auditor told her that some items could be scanned but the originals of others had to be kept for seven years. Ms. Falla asked about the budget for new classroom furniture not identified. Mr. Felton said this item could be reduced.

Ms. Kennedy asked if the other board members were comfortable with a local assessment increase of 4.9%. Ms. Minery said she would like to see that figure reduced to 3%. She said conference travel could be eliminated with staff attending conferences online next year and returning to in-person attendance the following year. Also things to be looked at, she said, are the rental of space at 47 Main Street and the school warning lights. She asked why the occupational therapist position could not be bumped up from 2-1/2 days to five days a week. Chairperson Garrett said the benefit would be that this person would be an integral part of the team. Ms. Kilbride asked if there would be enough staff to substitute if that person were absent. Ms. Minery said the music position will have to be looked at if Ms. O'Neal does not want to take on music as well as band. Mr. Felton said Ms. O'Neal has done a very good job with the band and he believes having four days a week with a music/band combination is a viable option. Ms. Minery said the band program is very strong and the teacher has been great. Ms. Falla said she believes the assessment percentage should be lower. She said the community would support a smaller increase but anything over 3% would be a hard sell. Chairperson Garrett said she believes the budget put forward is one the school needs and she doesn't mind the increase in the assessment.

Ms. Minery said she would like to hear more from Mr. Felton and Dr. Berry about the full-time special education director position. Mr. Felton said what the school has now is a successful program with the result that all classes across the school are functioning better because the students are having their needs met. The concern, he said, is that special education programs and costs will not stop growing. One reason the school created the Life Skills and Day Treatment programs was to help slow the increase in special education costs by reducing high-cost out-of-district placements. He said with the staff and training required, the oversight needed, and the paperwork it resembles managing a school within a school. Dr. Berry said every day she is in split positions, with teaching and paperwork and doing appropriate programming. She said she wants to be fully committed and give 100% but feels that splitting her positions does not permit that. Ms. Falla asked Mr. Felton if he is considering accepting students from other districts. Mr. Felton said he hopes to create the best program possible and he anticipates that will happen if the school has the space, the personnel, and the programming. He said some people assume that a small school can't do that but he believes the St. George School can show that is not correct. He added that St. George students are getting the best care here and he would not want to send them anywhere else. He said he wants St. George to be a

teaching school and having interns come from universities and community colleges helps with staffing. Chairperson Garrett asked if it will be hard to find a teacher to replace Dr. Berry. Dr. Berry said the best part of the team has been created and she doesn't believe it will be hard to find a replacement. She said she spends a great deal of her time with RTI (Response to Intervention), which builds up support in the classroom for students who arrive not ready to learn. Mr. Felton said RTI is a systematic intervention that is part of regular education and targets students who are functioning below grade level academically and behaviorally/social emotionally. Ms. Minery asked if the school would no longer need consulting services if it had a full-time special education director. Dr. Berry said those services are very specific for behavioral programs. Ms. Minery asked if this is a pay-as-you-go service. Mr. Felton said it is.

Ms. Falla asked if the \$10,000 budgeted for special education stipends for teachers is in their contract. Mr. Felton said that the stipend is part of the Teachers Contract. Ms. Minery stated that the Board has the option on whether or not to offer specific stipends. Mr. Felton said the special education administrative work that the stipend was for wouldn't be needed with a full-time special education director.

Ms. Falla asked about the budget for books in Article 2. Dr. Berry said some upper grade level students are reading below grade level and no student wants to go into class with what looks like a child's book. She said the 6th to 8th grade students need a selection of books that is built to engage their interest. Ms. Falla asked about the budget for math camp in Article 1. Mr. Felton said Mr. Bullard is looking to get a grant to fund it. Ms. Falla asked about the cost of color printing which if reduced would save money. Ms. Kilbride said the number of copies has gone up because of Covid. Mr. Felton said he can share with the leadership team that the school is trying to reduce unnecessary expenditures to help cover other costs and that reducing color copies would help. Ms. Falla asked about the budget for physical education supplies. Chairperson Garrett said this past year students couldn't share them. Ms. Kilbride said some were used for recess. Mr. Felton said this is an area he can look at. Ms. Minery said Mr. Felton and Ms. Kilbride could discuss field trips to see if this is an area that might be reduced. Ms. Falla asked about the budget for headphones. Mr. Felton said it is for replacements. Ms. Falla asked if there was a way to repurpose reading decodables. Mr. Felton said he will look into that. Ms. Falla asked about Johns Hopkins classes for gifted and talented students. Mr. Felton said it is a college course specifically geared to students who are way ahead in their class. Ms. Falla asked if there might be something in the University of Maine system that would benefit these students. Mr. Felton said he will check on this.

Mr. Felton said Ms. Kilbride and he will review the board's suggestions and he will bring a fairly polished draft of the budget to the next workshop.

Adjournment: The workshop ended at 9:06 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Diane E. Speranza
Recording Secretary