

Cape Schools Open Minds and Open Doors

Community • Academics • Passion • Ethics

CAPE ELIZABETH SCHOOLS

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It's hard to believe we are already in February. That means a lot is happening at the school board level as we tackle the budget for FY 2020/2021. Administrators have been working on the budget since October and now the discussions begin at the level of the school board. We are always impressed with the time, thoughtfulness and diligence in the initial presentation to the school board. The administrators all advocate for the needs of their department, but as we begin making challenging choices of what stays in the budget while maintaining a fiscally responsible tax implication, collaboration and cooperation is always at the center of the discussion, as is what is best for the students and district as a whole.

On February 4, the Building Committee met for the fourth time. However, the beginning of this process really was two years ago when there was concern for the safety in the entryway of Pond Cove and the Middle School as well as concern for the inadequacy of the cafetorium. A thorough vetting of different firms to study our schools was completed in the summer of 2018. In June of 2019, voters approved the school budget, which gave us the green light to hire Colby Company and Scott Simon Architects to begin an extensive analysis of our schools to create a Needs Assessment. As experts in their fields, they did an excellent job, compiling multiple one to two-page reports. Each report references a code for urgency, a rough cost estimate, basic specs and further helpful information to get the project off the ground. They ranged from window replacements to replacement of the cafetorium and kitchen.

As a result of the Needs Assessment, a Building Committee of about 40 members was formed, consisting of administrators, school board members, town council members, teachers, parents and community members, some with extensive and professional knowledge of the very issues being discussed. In the first three meetings of the Building Committee, we listened to the architects and engineers as they presented us with information about our buildings. They presented us with the challenges of buildings close to the end of their lives, the challenges with energy and efficiency that we face and showed us comparisons with other situations and schools they have worked with. It was during these meetings that the conversation regarding new construction and new buildings began. We heard from our Facilities Manager, Perry Schwarz, who expressed just how challenging the maintenance of the buildings is for him on a daily basis due to the fact that the buildings are so old, and the issues and failings are unpredictable. Not only is maintenance unpredictable, but the cost is escalating every year and it is irresponsible to ignore it. The band aid approach is not sustainable. He compared it to the country fair game, Whack a Mole. We also heard from Town Manager, Matt Sturgis, about bonding capacity as well as certain bonds in the town that will be retired, helping to paint a better picture of our ability to take on debt.

Our February 4th meeting was time to start processing the information. After three meetings with the engineers and architects, this meeting was just the committee. Superintendent Wolfrom began by reminding members of the committee of the Future Search that took place a year ago. It was a day and a half process to begin creating a Strategic Plan for the district. There were about 100 participants including administrators, school board members, teachers, parents, students, business owners, police officers, clerics, realtors and many more. The purpose was to generate ideas from all in order to synthesize the information into a guiding document with broad representation. Eventually, a Strategic Plan with 5 goals was created. You can access these goals [here](#). Superintendent Wolfrom referred to two of these goals at the meeting. They were:

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- **Safe, Sustainable, and Effective Facilities** - Our Schools will be safe and effective facilities. They will be updated and maintained to meet the needs of students and staff in accordance with long-term financial planning.
- **Environmental responsibility** - The school department will prioritize environmental responsibility, including stewardship and sustainability.

The charge of the Building Committee is to make a recommendation to the School Board regarding the condition of the three schools guided by these Strategic Goals, the will of the community as defined by the Future Search process. The committee then broke up into 7 groups to discuss the following questions:

1. What does safe mean?
2. What does effective facilities mean?
3. What is our environmental responsibility as a district?
4. What is our financial responsibility to the district and the community?

The committee brought their ideas together to discuss the compiled outcome to answer these questions collectively. They will be incorporated in the Building Committee Meeting minutes once they are completed.

Keeping these central thoughts in mind, 4 options developed by the engineers and architects were presented to the group:

Option 1: Phased Lower School and Middle School Building Replacement.

Option 2: Concurrent Lower School and Middle School Building Replacement.

Option 3: Frame-Off Restoration and Renovation of the existing Lower and Middle Schools.

Option 4: Security and Cafetorium Upgrades.

These options are by no means the only options, but a place to begin the conversation. They will be discussed in the upcoming meeting on Wednesday, March 4 at 6:30 in the High School library. All are welcome and it will be televised.

Finance update

On January 21, 2020, auditors from Runyon Kersteen Ouellette (RKO) presented the annual audit of the school and municipal budgets for the fiscal year that ended on June 30, 2019. Thanks to the diligence of our new Business Manager, Marcia Weeks, and the town's new Finance Director, John Quartararo, the reports were brief and positive.

Back in July 2019, the Maine Department of Education announced that it would be accepting applications for the State Revolving Renovations Fund, with a deadline of September 20. With so little

time to prepare the thorough, professional quality applications required, we were lucky to have the newly completed Needs Assessment, produced by Colby Company Engineers and Scott Simons Architects. Our twelve project applications were taken directly from the list of urgent or “red” priority issues identified in the Needs Assessment, and totaled just shy of \$1M.

At the beginning of February, the school department found out that the State of Maine approved six of the applications that CESD submitted, totaling \$390,429. The Cape Elizabeth School Department will receive funding for those projects at a 0% interest rate, with a payback period of five years, with 30% of the total forgiven. So, the school department will only have to pay back \$273,300. Per requirements of the DOE program, the projects are discrete, targeted improvements that are considered high priority and can be completed in a relatively short amount of time.

More good news: The state has released its preliminary education subsidy figures, and Cape Elizabeth is projected to receive \$36,000 more than it did last year. Last year was the first year Cape Elizabeth received an increase in subsidy, following three straight years of significant, unsustainable cuts. This year CESD will also receive \$44,000 for its continued participation in a regional cost-sharing center, the Greater Sebago Education Alliance.

The FY21 school budget review process is well underway, following the first, extended budget workshop. Building principals and department directors have presented their information, and now it's time for the School Board's intensive Question & Answer period.

Upcoming budget workshops:

Tuesday February 25 at 6:30 pm, CEHS Library and Learning Commons

Tuesday March 3 at 6:30 pm, Town Council Chambers

Tuesday March 24 at 6:30 pm, 6:30 pm, CEHS Library and Learning Commons

Tuesday April 7 at 6:30 pm, , Location TBD

All School Board budget workshops are open to the public, videotaped, and posted online.

Policy Update

The Policy Committee met on January 28th to review and discuss the following policies:

ACAA – Harassment and Sexual Harassment of Students

ACAA- R - Student Discrimination and Harassment Complaint Procedure

JLF - Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting

JLFA - Child Sexual Abuse Prevention and Response

JLF-R - Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting - Administrative Procedure

The Policy Committee will bring policies JLF and JLFA before the Board at the next regular business meeting scheduled for February 11 for a first reading. Due to the need for further discussion and review, ACAA will not be brought before the Board this month, and will be the subject of further discussion at the February Policy meeting.

All policies are posted on the CESD website in the School Board section policy tab.

Policy committee meetings are open to the public, including students. The next policy meeting is scheduled for February 25th at 3:00 in the Jordan Conference Room.

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Upcoming meetings

Tuesday **February 25** at 3:00 pm, Policy Meeting, Jordan Conference Room

Tuesday **February 25** at 6:30 pm, Budget Meeting, CEHS Library and Learning Commons

Tuesday **March 3** at 6:30 pm, Budget Meeting, Town Council Chambers

Wednesday **March 4** at 6:30 pm, Building Committee Meeting, CEHS Library and Learning Commons

Tuesday **March 10** at 6:30 pm, Regular Business Meeting, Town Council Chambers

Tuesday **March 17** at 6:30 pm, Building Committee Meeting, CEHS Library and Learning Commons

Tuesday **March 24** at 6:30 pm, 6:30 pm, Budget Meeting, CEHS Library and Learning Commons

Tuesday **April 7** at 6:30 pm, Budget Meeting, Location TBD