

Date Approved/Released: 5/4/17

Date Approved/Hold: \_\_\_\_\_

School Committee Chair: Lawrence Murphy

SCHOOL COMMITTEE & FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING  
THURSDAY, MARCH 30, 2017  
TOWN HALL AUDITORIUM  
FY'18 BUDGET PRESENTATION

**1. Call to order: 6:04 P M.**

**Present:**

Danielle LaPointe (Chair), Dawn Fronte, Larry Murphy,  
Steven Haddad, Superintendent Richard Ikonen, Business Manager

Finance Committee: Maureen Ward, Christian Orobello, James Robichaud,  
Charles Corts

**2. Pledge of Allegiance**

6:05 PM - D. LaPointe explained there was a miscommunication regarding the start time of the meeting.

D. Fronte moved to enter into recess and reconvene when the Finance Committee arrives at 6:30 PM. Second by L. Murphy. Approved 3-0-0.

6:30 PM Reconvened.

Finance Committee was called to order.

**3. New Business**

a. Change in term end-not addressed

b. FY 2018 Budget Review:

S. Haddad explained that the budget was created based on the 5-year District Strategic Plan. S. Haddad noted we have been a Level 3 School (since 2008) and working towards Level 1. S. Haddad reviewed the district's history over the last decade. The Strategic Plan, the Improvement Plan for the District (IPOD), each School Improvement Plan along with the School Committee Strategic Goals will be aligned to reflect back to the Strategic Plan. The alignment and success of the plans are regularly assessed; they will be aligned by FY18. Recommendations cited in the District Accountability Review conducted by Department of Elementary and Secondary Education have been incorporated in the above referenced plans. S. Haddad noted the declining enrollment resulted in lower state and local aid; the Plans have measures to stop and reverse that trend.

The district will post online as each initiative and action plan is completed. M. Ward stressed communication between the district and community is very important.

S. Haddad explained that increased product costs and negotiated contracts contributed to the budget deficit. The loss of 56 students resulted in a decrease of \$ 356,000 from foundation (Chapter 70) funding. The results of the student exit survey will be presented when they are compiled; those numbers are now being tracked. This does not include students who choose to attend Monty Tech.

S. Haddad reviewed the revised proposed budgets, dated March 30, 2017, including the necessary cuts in programs and positions. S. Haddad explained the position moves throughout the district.

The 3 proposed budgets can be summarized as:

Balanced Budget-eliminates positions and programs

Improved Budget- brings teachers back

What We Really Need Budget- brings back teachers, support staff and adds Director of Curriculum position.

L. Murphy-The What We Really Need budget is a reasonable budget that includes the improvements that are in the District Accountability Review to provide quality education and keep students from leaving. He also stressed the importance of consistent leadership. He stated the foundation budget is unfair; it does not allow the district to compete with Montachusett Regional Vocational Technical School, Charter, Religious and Private schools.

Difficulties comparing previous budgets to the current proposals were discussed; it is difficult to see where money is being spent year to year. Changes in the structure of the proposed and future budgets will create transparency and allow comparisons. R. Ikonen explained that he is working with Bill Schlosstein to make a "chart of accounts" by the end of FY18. He explained how the reclassification of positions and programs make the line item numbers hard to track. J. Robichaud asked for an accounting of FTE and part-time employees in specific categories. M. Ward questioned the increase number of teachers in light of decreased enrollment. Special Education (SPED) programs are being fine tuned to bring students back from out of district placements. The frequent turnover of Superintendents and Business Manager positions. Collaborative with Mount Wachusett Community College and the pooling/combining of resources with small schools in our area is being looked into. The benefits of Murdock Academy were noted. The need to publicize school achievements was discussed, including Teacher Highlights and Blue Devil Cool recognitions. C. Orobello stated the Finance Committee is looking for the whole picture, to see what we are spending and then show where money is coming from, especially unusual items. Individual line items and discrepancies were noted and discussed.

R. Ikonen noted he will make additional reclassifications to balance the FY17 budget. Upon request, he will identify the total amount spent on specific line items, including grant funding. Vendor collaboration with Town Hall could result in budget savings. The switch from tuition based to no tuition allows the district to access Chapter 70 funds for the Pre-Kindergarten program. S. Haddad noted positive aspects of the district.

S. Haddad asked the principals to speak on the impact of the additional budget cuts

Middle School- Jessica Vezina, Assistant Principal at the Murdock Middle School, stated she is completely invested in the town and school system. She read a statement about the uniqueness of the Middle School years. She reported on significant positive changes in student behavior, adding the proposed cuts will stop that momentum due to larger class size and reduced staff. She explained how the loss of the music program, inclusion services in the classroom and pull out services, after school programs and other resources would negatively impact the students' education. The number of students who choice-out during or at the end of middle school was discussed.

Suzanne Michel, Assistant Director of Pupil Services, noted her position transformed 4 times last year and that she is now more of a district wide employee. Maintaining the Life- Long Learning Program could allow some students to return to the district, which would be a cost savings. There is a long waitlist for the Pre-school; eligible children from town are unable to attend due to limited resources. She noted the potential loss of these students, and the state funding that follows them, for their entire academic career. There is the space capacity to add more students but the program would need to add another teacher. She is working to align the program with the curriculum and constantly looks for more grant opportunities. S. Haddad noted data supports the claim that the students are doing very well academically and socially.

Kris Provost, Director of the Murdock Academy for Success, explained the theory and purpose of the alternative school. Students have online learning and teachers who work with them in small groups to help them succeed. He noted the school has brought students back and gives access to high school classes, clubs and activities. A grant allows students to participate in an internship work program and gain work experience; he explained the benefits of the program. S. Haddad reviewed the increasing number of graduates from the program.

Suzanne Michele also stated that the loss of an entire Middle School team does not allow the district to grow and improve; we have to maintain what we have.

The Budget Public Hearing is on April 6<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 PM. The committee will vote on the budget at its meeting on April 13<sup>th</sup>.

The Town Meeting article will be written and can be withdrawn if the committee does not feel it will be supported. D. LaPointe noted it is clear the committee needs to get the story out at public meetings.

J. Robichaud stated the school district got \$300,000 in 2014; an additional override will be a tough sell.

C. Orobello stated the school committee must connect dollars to outcomes; to show the result of the investment.

L. Murphy thanked the FinCom for their understanding and pointed questions. He agreed the committee has to show the town that it can be trusted with the money and provide the leadership, adding he wants to see legacy of excellence return.

S. Haddad explained his initiative to build a "Wall of Fame" that highlights Murdock graduates and their success.

**4. Citizen Questions and/or Comments: None**

**5. Adjournment:** 8:38 PM M. Ward motioned for the Finance Committee to adjourn.

Second by J. Robichaud. Approved 4-0-0.

L. Murphy moved to adjourn the School Committee.

Second by D. Fronte. Approved -0-0.

Respectfully submitted: Barrie E. Martins, School Committee Recording Secretary