

TOWN OF PROVINCETOWN

SCHOOL COMMITTEE

February 9, 1999

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Members Present: Lois Borgesi (Chair), Frank Wills, William Rogers, Adrienne Duncan.

Members Absent: None

Others Present: Dr. Susan Fleming (Superintendent), Michael Marino (PHS Principal), William Rokicki (VMES Principal/Director of Student Services), parents and staff.

PUBLIC HEARING

1999-2000 SCHOOL BUDGET

Chair Lois Borgesi called the Public Hearing to order at 7:05 PM. Mrs. Borgesi read the Notice of Public Hearing and explained the hearing procedures.

Dr. Fleming referred to the FY 2000 Proposed Budget dated January 26, 1999. She explained the table and graph on the cover page. The overall budget increase from the previous year is \$41,447.43 or 1.1%. Increased items in the budget amounted to approximately \$164,200 and decreased items equaled approximately \$122,700.

Dr. Fleming then distributed material showing how the District could still achieve a 0% increase budget. Dr. Fleming recommended a zero increase budget because of savings and new money that had just come into the District. She explained in detail these savings as shown in the handout entitled, AProvincetown School Budget Changes: Recommended Savings, as of February 9, 1999.@ For an immediate example, Dr. Fleming introduced Mark Ford, the new Technology Coordinator, who had been hired at a lower salary than the previous Coordinator. Also, the District just got confirmation of 65% discount on its telecommunications expenses. Other savings and new funds resulted from an error made by the State Department of Education and School Choice changes. Dr. Fleming referred to the last page of both handouts which showed the School Budgets and number of students over time, from 1995-96 to 1999-00.

William Rogers said he was pleased by the Superintendent=s recommendation.

Lois Borgesi opened the Hearing for public comment.

Paul Silva asks about a \$19,000 shift in School Choice funds and whether that could lead to a deficit. Dr. Fleming replied that the Committee usually decides about School Choice funds in May and, at that time, the Committee would have to allocate \$19,000 from this year to the next year. Otherwise, the Committee would have to find the money elsewhere or make cuts. Mr Silva asked if it was the usual practice to deal with these funds in this way and Dr. Fleming explained how such shifts were justified - that last year one teacher's aide was paid from School Choice funds because they are getting SPED kids in School Choice. She said that the long-range practice was not yet decided, however.

Kathy Schiffenhaus referred to various budget options and commented on the fact that more than 25% of the students are in the SPED program to one degree or another. She said she did not understand how the SPED budget can decrease. Dr. Fleming explained that the major part of the decrease was coming from a reduction in the number of private residential students, that two students had graduated and one had moved. Ms Schiffenhaus then asked if the number of students in the early learning program was decreasing. Dr. Fleming said that they are counting on having 25 kids in pre-school. Mr. Rokicki said that they will probably wind up with 27 kids. Dr. Fleming explained that the early learning budget was decreasing because the teachers' aides in the early learning program have been moved to the SPED budget pages - just a simple line-item shift. Mr. Rokicki said that the District had received more in Chapter 21 funds, which were used for the early learning program. Dr. Fleming added that the District had also received a \$13,000 grant from the Children's Center.

Frank Wills commented that SPED expenses were hard to calculate, that some SPED cases are very expensive and others are more like the regular students. He said that the trend was that more SPED kids are attending public schools. Ms Schiffenhaus said she felt it was better to keep kids in the local schools and Frank Wills said he was not in agreement with her on that.

Ms Schiffenhaus said that she also had a problem with the difference in the number of students per teacher. She said it was unbalanced that teachers are getting salary increases simply due to longevity. Dr. Fleming said that Mr Rokicki will be looking at various co-teaching and multi-grade options, that this year the student distribution worked out oddly. The District has no choice in following IEP's and no choice about the teachers' contract. She said that the Provincetown's teachers' salaries are at or below the Cape average. Ms Schiffenhaus commented further that the combined salary of teachers in small classes was large, that they need to combine classes better, that they could cut teachers' aides, but that it was not financially feasible this year. She said they needed to look at why parents are placing kids in certain classes.

Jessica Waegh asked if the parents have the final choice on SPED placement. Dr. Fleming replied that the decision is made by a team and that the parents can appeal the placement to the State.

Anika Ayello said she is the parent of a residential placement child and two other students and that she is glad that classes are small. She said it makes more sense for the kids stay in the local schools and better than residential placement. Dr. Fleming said that if a parent felt that the least restrictive environment is locally, then that preference should be brought to the team. Ms Ayello said that there are no appropriate programs locally for her most extreme child, that they need to create something locally. Dr. Fleming mentioned that Mr. Rokicki will be giving a presentation on SPED programs to the Committee in the near future.

Paul Ferrick said that the budget is showing a decrease of \$41,000, despite the various shifts. He suggested that any new funds be utilized to improve the MCAS scores.

Jody Brown agreed with Mr Ferrick, saying that the budget will not look good to parents, that the money should be used for more books and field trips. She said the Committee could stay with a 1.1% increase budget, that they will get the support.

Donna Joseph said her son is in the first grade class and asked about the multi-age class. Adrienne Duncan responded that it is the parents' choice whether to place their children in the regular class or the multi-age class. Lois Borgesi said that at the time the choice of class option was instituted, the numbers of students were higher. If the number of students stays low, they may no longer be able to offer the choice of class. Mr. Rokicki will be making a future recommendation on this issue. Ms Joseph said that the kids are getting confused and are feeling isolated, that it is difficult for the teacher

and aide to deal with the reduction in their class.

Linda Rego said she also has a first grade student and wanted to know if the traditional, single grade class would eventually be eliminated. Lois Borgesi replied that the Committee could not answer yet, that the Administration has to make a recommendation. The Committee had agreed to take a hard look at the number of students and to make appropriate changes. Dr. Fleming said that Mr Rokicki does have a preliminary plan for the VMES and the discussion on that plan would start with the School Council. Dr. Fleming said that there is a commitment to keep the staffing steady, but that they may have to redesign how staff is allocated. She invited the parents to take part in the meetings on this issue. Mr. Rokicki confirmed that they will be holding meetings soon and encouraged parents to attend. He said that the first grade class is getting a very rich education.

Noreen Baring asked if reconfiguring would affect the budget. Dr. Fleming said that if the budget passes Town Meeting, there would not be a reduction in the number of teachers, except for those already on the budget pages. She said that resources needed to be allocated equitably to provide sound education to all students.

Mr Adams asked about the early learning program cuts and Dr. Fleming again explained that the staffing was remaining the same, but that they had received more money from outside sources, so fewer staff are being paid from the Operating Budget. Mr Silva asked about the net income from the early learning program and Dr. Fleming explained specific details of the early learning budget, that the income pays for 1.4 teacher=s aides. The District actually spends about \$110,000 from various sources on early learning.

Paul Silva asked if there was a dollar limit on the MCAS improvement effort. Dr. Fleming responded by saying that \$30,000 had originally been budgeted for professional development, but that the \$40,000 received for the District Improvement Grant was now going toward professional development.

Terese Nelson asked about the e-rate (telecommunications) discount. Dr. Fleming answered that the district had applied for federal funding for telecommunications and received the 65% discount because of the free lunch program. The District will get the discount, plus a check. Ms Nelson asked why this savings was not communicated to the school councils. Lois Borgesi said that they had just received the commitment letter and Dr. Fleming confirmed that the District had just received the commitment letter a week ago.

Ms Rego thanked the Committee for discussing a 0% budget. Ms Schiffenhaus said that Provincetown elementary school is one of the best, that the teachers and Mr. Rokicki are very ethical. She said that the kids are getting a good education and that she is not for cutting any teachers or closing schools. She said that multi-age classes are OK. A 0% increase budget means cuts are being made somewhere, however, though it looks good on paper. She reminded the Committee that they do not have to please any one group of taxpayers. Dr. Fleming responded that they have worked very hard to bring in extra money. She also supports providing a high quality education. She said that she has never worked in a more generous town, but that the schools need everyone=s support. She reviewed again the Committee=s and Administration=s commitment to look at staffing when enrollment declines - that they cannot afford to ignore the large financial issues facing the community. There is a tremendous generosity in Town toward education, but the schools need to be sensitive when asking for resources.

Ms Nelson asked if the 0% budget will decrease the chances of further cuts. Dr. Fleming replied that the 0% budget will give the Committee a united voice, that they had a better chance at 0% than 1.1%. Ms Nelson said that she felt that a 0% budget will not make a difference at Town Meeting. Dr. Fleming said that they were hoping for a more unanimous vote at Town Meeting with a 0% budget. Lois Borgesi said that the Committee has not yet decided on the budget, but, regardless, they will need support from the parents.

Deb Trovato said that at 1.1% budget was not asking for extras, and, in fact, meant a \$9,300 decrease at VMES. The Committee needs to approach the budget decision like a business and provide a little cushion. A 0% budget could lead to a greater cut. Frank Wills replies that perhaps 1.1% would give a cushion, but that he has talked with voters and feels that the chances are better of getting through smoothly with 0%.

Jody Brown said that there are only five Selectmen, but that there are lots of people committed to the schools. Jessica Waugh mentioned the low attendance at School Committee meetings. She said there was a bad public reaction to the 1.1% budget. She said the staff are doing MCAS work for no extra money. She reminded everyone of the 1998 eight

vote budget cut.

Anika Ayello said that she felt that it should not be a battle between regular education and SPED. The Committee and the parents need to see that it is about all the kids. Paul Ferrick said Town Meeting is a good time for generosity, that the 0% budget is really a \$41,000 decrease. He said that the loudmouths at Town Meeting could cut further and that he believes the voters would support the 1.1% budget.

Ms Baring said that it made sense to ask for the same increase as last year, that they got 1.4% last year and are only asking for 1.1% this year. She said that the decline in enrollment is not that great. The extra money recently received could be used for High School programs. She said she was surprised at the buildings= deterioration, that they were not stimulating to students.

Dr. Fleming commented that the main purposes of a quality public education would be accomplished with a 0% budget. The District has lost 27 students or 5% but was not making any staff cuts. And the have lost more students over that past 6 years. They are not selling out, but have rather found other ways to stay at 0%, providing a strong stance for Town Meeting.

Noreen Baring said they will be required to be creative in the future, that it is more realistic to ask for more money. Lois Borgesi said that the School Committee needs to focus on this year alone, but that they are committed to maintaining a K-12 system and to providing quality education.

Ms Rego said that Dr. Fleming had said the budget cut was due to a loss of 27 students, but wondered if the district was getting more students in September. Dr. Fleming replied that they may actually be losing another 3 students next year.

The district received \$80,000 for an architectural study to determine how to improve and maintain the buildings and that the school committee will have to ask the Town for building project money if the project goes forward.

Lois Borgesi closed the public comment part of the hearing.

William Rogers said that he never again wants to go through the budget line-by-line. He said they started talking about the budget with a discussion on streamlining and accountability and improving the programs. William Rogers then reviewed the history of the budget process and said he wanted to know what improvements are being made. He does not want to cut the budget just because extra money is coming in, that the School Committee has a right to use the money to improve programs. Dr. Fleming said that they could use the extra money for programs and hardware.

Lois Borgesi also reviewed the budget process and said that since January 12th, things have changed. The School Committee needs to decide how to use the extra money. They are committed to not cutting staff, so they can use the money to reduce the budget or for other things. Dr. Fleming said the money could be used for the After-School Program.

Adrienne Duncan said that at 1.1% they are not asking for anything new and that they can justify the increase. Lois Borgesi responded by saying they could not go to Town Meeting and say that the extra money had not been used to reduce the budget. William Rogers said that he wanted the public to know that this is only this year=s budget, that things could change.

William Rogers made a motion to support the Proposal of Dr. Fleming to bring the budget to a 0% increase by the line items presented, Frank Wills seconded. Motion discussion: Frank Wills said he has been talking to townspeople, but that the School Committee is not trying to please any one group. They are trying to maintain a K-12 system, while being aware of other financial issues in Town. He said that the chances of not being cut are better at 0% and he will

support such a budget. Lois Borgesi said that since January 12th she and Dr. Fleming have attended fiscal meetings and that education is being lumped in among other Town projects. She said she was undecided. William Rogers said it would not be difficult to support Dr. Fleming=s proposal and listed pluses and accomplishments. He said he is not being intimidated by any one group, that they are rather doing the right thing, that they have streamlined and made improvements. Adrienne Duncan said that she cannot see them going in at 0%, that 1.1% will only even out the cuts and she can support the increase.

After discussion, the School Committee voted to approve the motion by a vote of 3 -1 (Adrienne Duncan).

Lois Borgesi said that she had hoped for a unanimous vote. Adrienne Duncan said that, if the motion were reconsidered, she would change her vote to present a united front.

Frank Wills made a motion to reconsider the last motion, William Rogers seconded and it was so voted, 4-0.

William Rogers again made a motion to support the Proposal of Dr. Fleming to bring the budget to a 0% increase by the line items presented, Frank Wills seconded, and it was so voted unanimously, 4-0.

Chair Lois Borgesi closed the Public Hearing at 9:11 PM and called a short recess.

REGULAR SESSION

Chair Lois Borgesi convened the Regular Session at 9:27 PM. All four members of the School Committee were present.

VISITORS= STATEMENTS

There were no Visitors= Statements

MINUTES

- **December 10, 1998** - *Adrienne Duncan made a motion to approve with corrections, Frank Wills seconded and it was so voted.*
- **January 12, 1999** - *Adrienne Duncan made a motion to approve with corrections, Frank Wills seconded and it was so voted.*
- **January 27, 1999** - postponed.

COMMUNICATIONS

Dr. Fleming presented the following:

- A memo from Molly Lovelock of the Lower Cape Cod Community Development Corporation concerning a meeting on ACampus Provincetown@;
- A letter from Dr. Fleming to Arthur Reis confirming his resignation as building custodian;
- A Public Meeting Notice for a meeting between the School Committee and the Finance Committee on February 26th;
- A Public Meeting Notice for a Selectmen=s meeting on February 11th (and other dates), to discuss the Long Range Financial Plan (Facility Needs and Fiscal Realities);
- A letter from Selectmen Chair Betty Steele-Jeffers concerning the VMES School Council letter and stickers;
- A request for a joint meeting with the Truro School Committee to discuss the Tuition Agreement;
- A proposal for photocopy machine leasing;
- The text of the School Committee=s, the Superintendent=s, the VMES and the High School portions of the Annual Town Report;
- A copy of the Facility Needs and Fiscal Realities Report;
- The District=s Monthly Financial Statement, dated 2/12/99;
- Dr. Fleming again introduced Mark Ford, the new Technology Coordinator, to the Committee.

EDUCATION UPDATE

MCAS/Math & Science - Dr. Fleming distributed a memo sent to Math and Science teachers concerning their participation in the Summer Institute. She also distributed examples of responses to open-ended questions and discussed the 4th grade example question. William Rogers asked if the kids were still learning computation skills and Dr. Fleming said, yes, but that the State is asking for more conceptual thinking. Dr. Fleming also distributed MCAS results Item Analysis for grades 4, 8 & 10 in Math.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Preliminary Report: Building Needs Assessment - Dr. Fleming distributed draft Proposed Work Items and Cost Estimates, one for each building, and will present final reports at the February 25th meeting.

Follow-Up: PTA and Parents VMES School Council Letter - Lois Borgesi referred to material sent to Legal Counsel and also to a letter from Betty Steele-Jeffers. Lois Borgesi had asked Counsel if the School Council letter was legal or illegal and Counsel responded that the letter was neither, but rather fell into a Agray area.@ The letter was, however, definitely not appropriate. The letter from Mrs Steele-Jeffers and the Selectmen stated their concerns. Adrienne Duncan asked if the School Council members should be present before the School Committee discussed the issue and Lois Borgesi said she did not know, but they need to respond to the Selectmen. Mr. Rokicki suggested that the discussion should perhaps be postponed, that he felt the Council members would want to be present. Adrienne Duncan said that the Council is a group of individuals and that not having them present could lead to problems. Dr. Fleming volunteered to meet with the School Council and explain the situation to them and invite them to the next meeting. By consensus, the School Committee postponed discussion until their next meeting.

Other

Dr. Fleming formally requested a SPED update at the next School Committee meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

School Technology Proposal Update - Dr. Fleming distributed a memo from her to the School Committee, requesting that School Choice monies in the amount of \$27,000 be used for a Technology Upgrade.

Adrienne Duncan moved to approve Dr. Fleming's request to use School Choice monies in the amount of \$27,000 for a Technology Upgrade, William Rogers seconded and it was so voted, 4-0.

Adrienne Duncan moved to allow the meeting to go past 10:00 PM, Frank Wills seconded and it was so voted unanimously.

Other - Dr. Fleming presented a draft Town Meeting article to transfer a sum of \$1,065.26 for the payment of an unpaid bill from Honeywell from a prior fiscal year. Lois Borgesi asked if the funds were encumbered and Dr. Fleming said, no, that she does not know how the bill went unpaid.

Adrienne Duncan moved to bring the unpaid bill to Town Meeting as an article, Frank Wills seconded and it was so voted, 4-0.

CLOSING STATEMENTS

There were no closing statements.

Adrienne Duncan made a motion to adjourn at 10:07 PM and it was so voted unanimously.