

DEERFIELD SCHOOL BOARD
DEERFIELD COMMUNITY SCHOOL –LIBRARY - 66 NORTH ROAD
DEERFIELD, NEW HAMPSHIRE
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 17, 2024 ~ 6:00 PM

Members/Participants: Kendra Cohen; Chair, Ellen O'Donnell, Danielle Palmer, Zach Langlois (6:05 pm), Nate Oxnard (7:01 pm)

Supt. Patty Sherman, Principal Kristen Withee, Asst. Principal Brian Grieve, Recording Secretary Trish Lafond

1. Call to Order – Ms. Cohen, Chair

Chair Cohen called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Cohen led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. Public Comments

Don Gorman said he had asked to be put on tonight's agenda but is not there. Chair Cohen informed him it is not standard practice to put people on as agenda items. He is welcome to speak as public comments. Mr. Gorman presented numbers concerning post-COVID scores of 4th and 8th graders in different learning areas. He said they were from a state agency but not which agency. He asked why scores are sliding in Deerfield. He read amounts of money from the state finance committee that were given to Deerfield from the "state building aid". He asked why money wasn't sent back to the town for tax relief.

Leah McHugh spoke as a Trustee of the Trust Funds. In reviewing the public hearing on December 28, 2023, she believes this was only posted in a Manchester newspaper. There are other avenues for getting this information out to the public. The Planning board and Conservation committee were not included in the development of the plan which goes against the original warrant article according to Ms. McHugh. She is concerned about not getting public feedback.

Greg Whitmore is concerned about the proposed warrant article VI. If it doesn't get passed will the agreements be changed? Chair Cohen said this will be addressed later in the meeting. A letter went to 8th grade parents saying the high school their child chooses is where they're locked into going which negates school choice.

Kim Black spoke concerning the placement of stop signs around the school. They are confusing.

Erroll Rhodes informed the board that the deadline for the next issue of the Dooryard Gazette is February 14, 2024, for any articles or information. They are also taking candidate statements.

Linda McNair-Perry said at the next Planning board meeting they will be talking about housing and school enrollment. She invited school board members to attend as there is talk of a new subdivision in Deerfield and the school will be impacted.

4. Agenda Review- Ms Cohen, Chair

Under Immediate Business:

Add I-2024-2025 School Calendar

Add J-next steps for the Fire Panel

Add K-location of school board meetings

5. Immediate Business

A. FY 24 Update

-\$366,000.00 as of today.

B. Updated Bus Routes

Supt. Sherman wanted to be sure board members saw all the revised bus routes as only the white bus route was in their drive. All members have seen them.

C. Warrant Articles

Supt. Sherman shared some language changes to a few of the warrant articles that were suggested by legal and did not change their intent.

The trust fund in Article VI is now named the High School Tuition Trust Fund.

Warrant Article I needs to be approved to be placed on the ballot as the Municipal Budget Committee changed the amount by adding \$74,000.00 for a third high school bus.

A motion was made by Zach Langlois, seconded by Kendra Cohen to move Article I as written.

3-1

MOTION CARRIED

Supt. Sherman informed the board that there will be a public hearing on 2-21-24 that is necessary for the public to share their thoughts on rescinding SB2.

Supt. Sherman spoke with legal concerning Warrant Article VI. A “No” vote does not void the agreements with the three high schools. Approval by the school board and Dept. of Education will make them schools of record and maintained by the school district.

Chair Cohen asked for notes for the voter guide.

D. Assignment of High School Students Policy

Danielle palmer said Ellen O'Donnell had done research with high schools in the area and Danielle used it to create a policy A student's commitment to a school is for 1 year not all 3. This is to avoid paying tuition to two high schools in one year for one student. Chair Cohen added some language to the policy.

E. Preschool-Lisa McConnell

Ms. McConnell reviewed the preschool enrollment this year. She stated the program is integrated with both special education students and mainstream. It is a 50/50 mix. It is sometimes hard to get mainstream because of the hours and days offered. She discussed how students are placed in the program by already receiving services, getting referrals from parents, doctors, Child Find etc. A small tuition is charged to mainstream students. It is a balance of school and play environment.

Ellen O'Donnell asked about PT, OT and Speech Pathologists. Are they on staff at DCS? She remembers when she was a teacher here that it saved the school money and gave the children more service time by having the students here rather than staff traveling all over to them.

Ms. McConnell said there are many benefits to having the students here at DCS.

F. Class Size

The board was given a spreadsheet of students by grade level and class.

There are 43 students in four kindergarten classes this year. Ellen O'Donnell said this is low and below state guidelines. Ms. O'Donnell suggested reducing to three classes next year and there would not be a need to reduce staff because we already have one staff member leaving. Principal Withee said this is not the norm. Historically the classes are larger. Kindergarten is not required so we don't know first grade numbers until they register. She stated it is hard to get a teacher back on the roster once the position is eliminated.

Zach Langlois said twenty students per class is doable but hard.

Ellen O'Donnell said twenty students per class is doable. She realizes the MBC is not in favor of the Para Agreement, but if you want to increase class sizes then you need para support. Larger numbers are better in middle school for doing group work. Principal Withee said it is different having low numbers in the elementary grades then it is in the middle school level. Kindergarten has small numbers, but some very strong personalities and behaviors that need a lot of support. Over 40% of our upcoming preschoolers have IEPs and need lots of support. Small classes in the lower grade levels makes a world of difference.

Ellen O'Donnell said the key is to remember if we have staff leaving then we may not need to replace them. She does not want to have to do reduction in staff.

G. Culture/Climate Survey

Supt. Sherman said she and Supt. Finley decided to do this district wide. Other school boards have been asking for one. Their target date to have it out is after February vacation. It will be anonymous other than telling if a person is a parent, staff, community member etc.

H. Science Grant

Principal Withee informed the board that both grades 6 and 7 will be going to Merrowvista environmental school this Spring. It used to be just grade 6 but that changed after COVID and we had classes that missed the experience in sixth grade so it was changed to seventh grade to allow them to experience it.

Sixth grade science teacher Kira Peasley wrote a grant to help with the cost and was awarded \$2,000.00 by the New Hampshire Environmental Educators to get outside.

A motion was made by Zach Langlois, seconded by Ellen O'Donnell, to accept the \$2,000.00 grant.

**ALL IN FAVOR
MOTION CARRIED**

I. School Calendar

Supt. Sherman informed the board that the calendar needs to be entered in ALMA. Our SAU was a pilot for the state. Brian Grieve brought it to the DEA for approval.

A motion was made by Zach Langlois, seconded by Kendra Cohen, to approve the calendar as presented.

**ALL IN FAVOR
MOTION CARRIED**

Kendra Cohen said some families would like to start after Labor Day. Supt. Sherman said they're more ready to start early than stay late in June. Chair Cohen deferred to administration. Ellen O'Donnell said the staggered start is very beneficial.

J. Fire Panel-

Supt. Sherman reached out to the State Fire Marshal and was told Fire Chief Fisher would be in touch. He still has not been in touch. Supt. Sherman said we have a state of the art fire system. Fire Chief Fisher will be invited to the next meeting. He will be informed that if he doesn't respond, the project will move ahead to completion.

L. School Board Meeting Location

Ellen O'Donnell brought up the location of school board meetings. Many people have reached out because they can't see/hear meeting over streaming. We need reliable streaming and recording equipment. Ellen reached out to town manager John Harrington and the town office meeting area is available the 3rd Wednesday of the month. Parks & Recreation is willing to move their meeting on the 1st Wednesday of the month to accommodate school board meetings. Meetings can happen at DCS if necessary. This topic will be revisited after the election.

Public Comments

Leah McHugh said WEBEX is not user friendly. She suggested ZOOM. She advocated for the meetings at GBW.

Kim Black asked about the DOE survey results. Concord athletes start at the same time as Coe-Brown. She said it is important to look at class sizes at DCS by class level on a yearly basis. Her son is in a preschool class of 18 students with aides.

Nancy Shute said the school board used to invite staff to meetings in the Fall and Spring. They may want to think about restarting that practice. She said classes can be too small. Hard to make groups.

Erroll Rhodes was delighted to hear about improving communication with the community and the board being open to holding meetings at GBW with improved A/V equipment.

Linda McNair-Perry said the town can adopt a fire code but it has to be on the state website. The board may need a mediator to deal with the fire chief. It would be money well spent.

6. Non-Public Session- NH RSA 91-A:3, II, - *if needed*
None

9. Adjournment

A motion was made by Kendra Cohen, seconded by Zach Langlois, to adjourn the meeting at 7:41 pm.

**ALL IN FAVOR
MOTION CARRIED**

Next Scheduled Deerfield School Board Meeting: February 7, 2024 ~ 6:00 P.M. Deerfield Community School