

Approved by the Rye School Board at its January 20, 2010 meeting.

**RYE SCHOOL DISTRICT
RYE, NEW HAMPSHIRE**

The second meeting of the School Board of the Rye School District to set the 2010-11 school district budget was held at the Rye Town Library on November 24, 2009 at 8:00 a.m.

PRESENT:

School Board Members: Ian Grant, Peggy Balboni, Michael Schwartz, and
Jeanne Moynahan, Betty Anderson

Administrators: Dr. George A. Cushing, Superintendent
James Katkin, Business Administrator
Mary Lyons, Director of Pupil Services
Chris Pollet, Principal, Rye Junior High
Patricia-Lane Richardson, Principal, Rye Elementary

Visitors: Kathy MacAlpine, Robin Husslage, Shauna Swist,
Paul Goldman, Mike Wolf

CALL TO ORDER:

Mr. Grant called the meeting to order at 8:05 a.m. stating this meeting was a continuation of the Rye School District's 2010-11 school budget review which was started at the November 19, 2009 meeting at the Rye Safety Building. He noted four or five items not yet discussed and one item which had been tabled.

Mr. Grant proposed beginning with a brief summary by Dr. Cushing or Mr. Pollet of the sabbatical request; then opening the meeting up for public comment; followed by Board discussion and votes.

Dr. Cushing referenced a letter of request for a 1-year sabbatical from Robin Ellwood so she could pursue her doctoral program. Dr. Cushing recommends granting the sabbatical. He said the language has been in the teachers' contract for over twenty years and Ms. Ellwood is the first teacher in twenty years to submit a request for sabbatical.

As RJH Principal, Dr. Cushing hired Ms. Ellwood. In 1995-1996 when the school population was 171, Ms. Ellwood began the Adventure Based Learning (ABL) program which allowed her to work with students outside the classroom and engage students in activities such as rock climbing, scuba diving, and dog sledding. As the school population grew Ms. Ellwood had to pick up more classes and was unable to continue the ABL program.

Ms. Ellwood has spent time in Antarctica as part of Teachers Experiencing Antarctica and the Arctic (TEA). She is one of three women who have dived under the icepack as part of this project and while on these expeditions she set up a blog and webcast with her students as well as others.

A couple of years ago there was a large display at the Christa McAuliffe Technology conference dedicated to Ms. Ellwood's expedition and her work in successfully sharing her Antarctica trip with students around the world.

Ms. Ellwood is enrolled in a doctoral program at UNH and is looking at successful ways to expand on ABL at Rye Junior High School.

Ms. Ellwood has written a \$150,000 grant with the Lietzl Center to get needed equipment to do research. If funded, RJH will receive \$60,000 worth of this equipment. Ms. Ellwood will receive a small stipend as part of the grant which will cover her health insurance during her sabbatical.

The second grant (year 2) will be for 2.5 million dollars and will set RJH and UNH as project-adventure based and inquiry-based learning centers. Money from this grant could expand facilities at RJH.

Upon her return, Ms. Ellwood will be armed with fresh knowledge and educational opportunities for children that will make for a rich learning environment. She is a special teacher and it is her goal "to work with science standards as a basis and blow the roof off science education in Rye."

Mr. Pollet said he sees the bigger picture by granting this sabbatical and that is where the energy comes from. If the Board supports a \$28,784 increase to the budget, it will show our commitment and support of the grant-writing process, and support of the offerings to RJH students down the road. Mr. Pollet said the bottom line is it is a unique opportunity and we have a great teacher who can fully implement this opportunity and all it brings.

Mr. Schwartz asked if Ms. Ellwood would be applying for funds for her herself through the grant. Dr. Cushing said she will receive a nominal fee as part of the first year grant, if funded, which would cover her health insurance costs.

Mr. Schwartz asked if the sabbatical could be split over two years and thus have only \$8,000 - \$9,000 impact to this year's budget. Mr. Katkin said the cost could be split over two years and cost would be closer to \$14,000 due to involuntary benefits.

Ms. Anderson asked if after the two years Ms. Ellwood would return at an increased level. Mr. Katkin said she would not receive a salary percent increase as she will not have been teaching during those two years but she would receive a degree bump and longevity.

Mr. Schwartz asked what kind of teaching candidates we might attract for just a two-year position. Mr. Pollet said he feels it is easier to find someone for a two-year position than a one-year position. He would anticipate applications from new teachers to the field, people in transition looking for short-term position, and those considering a move to the area.

Ms. Anderson asked if it would be fair to say we might not attract the best candidate given it is not a permanent teaching position. Mr. Pollet agreed that was a fair statement, but that he feels confident he could get a good candidate.

Mrs. Balboni pointed out that RES has had many qualified teachers apply for temporary positions within the school.

Mr. Pollet said it is a deeper pool than in previous years for a temporary replacement.

Mr. Grant asked about the impact of Ms. Ellwood's impact on students; the now 6th and 7th grade students who will not benefit from this amazing teacher. He asked if it's right or fair to these students, particularly when we say we're here for the students.

Mr. Pollet said next year's 7th grade class is large and he is committed to make sure we meet the needs of that class.

Mr. Grant reiterated his comments from Thursday's meeting regarding the sabbatical request:

- The District can't afford the sabbatical in this economic climate
- Social Security has had 0% increase for the first time since 1975
- Need to keep great teachers in the classroom
- We have asked for additional professional development funds for Rye teachers
- Struggles with science test scores – he wishes the science program were in a stronger place

Mr. Grant asked Mr. Pollet if we are producing the best possible writers at the 6th grade level. Mr. Pollet said he was not sure how to quantifiably measure that, but he is confident we have stronger writers now than in the past.

Mr. Grant noted that writing and math are two areas that he knows families hire tutors for their children and he wondered if the \$28,474 might be better used in these areas instead of for a sabbatical.

Mr. Pollet said there will be an incredible benefit to students in areas of science, writing, and research as a result of the sabbatical.

Mr. Grant restated his general question and asked if there were any other areas the \$28,000 could be better spent.

Mrs. Balboni said the science inquiry scores for 8th graders were low which makes an argument that this could be a wise investment in ways to improve students' skills in this area. Mr. Grant responded one could also make the argument the \$28,000 should be used to fix this problem now if it is an issue and not pay for a sabbatical where the teacher won't be able to affect change for three years from now.

Dr. Cushing said what's exciting to him is that after seeing an area charter school he saw first-hand the importance of making learning meaningful and relevant for all students whether they fit the traditional learning mode or not. This is precisely the benefit of a program like ABL.

Ms. Anderson said her greatest concern is asking taxpayers to pay for this, especially those on a fixed income. She said she loves the dream of ABL, she loved the Antarctic explorations and

was the voice of support for the third year requested leave. At that time her oldest daughter was going into the 8th grade and going to miss out on having Ms. Ellwood as a teacher. When Ms. Ellwood went to Antarctica, Ms. Anderson's daughter suffered because of it. The same was true two years later when her second daughter was in 8th grade and Ms. Ellwood went to Antarctica for the fourth time. The reality turned out not to fit the dream and she is concerned that history will repeat itself. Ms. Anderson feels there are still too many "ifs" in this proposal and she has a significant concern that we will not have the best pool of candidates for the temporary position.

Mrs. Balboni said we have the sabbatical leave in the contract, if we are not going to approve a sabbatical as requested now by Ms. Ellwood under what conditions would you?

Mr. Grant said a better economy is required before considering such a request. Ms. Anderson said more concrete information is needed, she can foresee many viable projects worthy of a sabbatical, but this is not one of them. Mrs. Balboni pointed out the project is to do research about developing a program so it is difficult to produce concrete information at this time.

Mr. Schwartz asked what will happen if the sabbatical request is denied. Dr. Cushing said if the Board denies a sabbatical with pay; they can then consider an unpaid sabbatical.

Mrs. Balboni said if the true concern is the ability to hire a qualified candidate for the temporary position, then the concern still exists whether you grant a paid or unpaid sabbatical. Ms. Anderson agreed. Mr. Grant said there would be an additional \$28,400 available to attract a temporary candidate.

Ms. Anderson made a motion, seconded for discussion by Mr. Grant, to deny Ms. Ellwood's paid sabbatical.

Public Comment

Mr. Grant opened the meeting for public comment.

Mike Wolf – Mr. Wolf questioned a sabbatical at the middle school teacher level. He believes Ms. Ellwood is a great teacher, supports her dreams, goals, and aspirations but feels this is a case of a teacher with an opportunity to follow her dreams. Mr. Wolf suggested talking with someone who successfully runs an ABL program now to see if the Board can get answers they feel are missing from the current proposal. Mr. Wolf said it is all about getting to a higher level. We could hire a full-time replacement, if Ms. Ellwood's dream/investment work the goal would be she doesn't come back as full-time 8th grade science teacher. If she has a dream she wants to pursue maybe the best thing to do is to let her go pursue it.

Mr. Wolf also thanked Mr. Schwartz for spearheading the 1:1 laptop program.

Kathy MacAlpine – Mrs. MacAlpine first complimented the Board for their process of discussing the sabbatical. She said she initially had many questions but learned the answers to most of them via the presentation and handouts. She said it sounds like a great dream but she isn't sure if it's right for Rye. She wonders how other staff members would feel. She said Ms. Ellwood's dream sounds great but she wonders about the impact on students during her absence. Mrs. MacAlpine

also questions the affordability of the sabbatical. Although she loves the idea, she is just not sure, as a practical matter, if we can afford this kind of teacher self-development. Mrs. MacAlpine said that she put herself through school and asked if it's proper we pay for Ms. Ellwood to pursue her PhD. She also worries if this would reduce funds available to others.

Robin Husslage – Ms. Husslage stated Ms. Ellwood has already had a total of 8 months of paid leave for her four Antarctica trips. Ms. Husslage said those absences were disruptive and a negative experience for her children. Based on past experience, Ms. Husslage doesn't hold out a lot of hope for the sabbatical leave. She said there has been no precedent set. Ms. Husslage noted a drop in the science NECAP scores and Rye's state ranking in science of 172 (out of 332). She does not feel there is any justification for granting the sabbatical.

Paul Goldman – Mr. Goldman was at the meeting as both a private citizen and chairman of the Rye Budget Committee. He was contacted anonymously by a citizen about today's meeting and the sabbatical request. He said the views of the public expressed at this meeting reflect the same concerns of the citizen that contacted him.

At the three thousand foot-level, Mr. Goldman said he believes in personal professional development and investment as it effects and can be measured by students' success.

As a representative of the town tax payer he jumps out to the 100,000 foot level and asks about the educational process. What happens to the students? What is the outcome? He asked for benchmarking and asked the Board to research the project to provide data to justify the sabbatical.

Mr. Goldman suggested strategically thinking of goals for creating excellent educators and proactively encouraging professional development.

In summary Mr. Goldman said his concern, from a budget standpoint, is misuse of funds toward betterment of education; concern about the gap for students in the teacher's absence, and he noted that it sounds like she is the only excellent teacher ... this should not be the case.

Mrs. MacAlpine asked a procedural question: Upon submission of the budget to the town for a vote. Can the budget committee eliminate a line item? Mr. Grant said they can reduce the amount of money but not specifically eliminate a line item.

Mr. Goldman said it is management by objective. They try to ensure an appropriate budget is in place but don't want to micromanage.

Dr. Cushing said we have exceptional teachers in Rye. The SAU and District have worked hard on the Professional Development Master Plan to provide professional development opportunities for our teachers. He is trying to convey that ABL and inquiry-based education are proven techniques and they want to incorporate these techniques across education. Networking with other districts already happens and will continue to grow.

Mrs. Balboni stated professional development in education isn't done passively. It is done by

leadership of teachers with colleagues.

Mr. Pollet said the professional development funds allowed for Rye teachers have already been used and much of their work is done over the summer.

Mrs. MacAlpine asked if granting the sabbatical would open the flood gates for other requests from staff. Dr. Cushing stated that this is the first request he knows of in the 21 years has been in SAU #50.

Mr. Wolf asked if a PhD is required to re-start ABL. He wonders if we can get on the path, gather more information and benchmarks and make some phone calls on behalf of the kids we serve.

Mrs. Moynahan said twelve years ago ABL was a line item in the budget. Student enrollment at the school increased and Ms. Ellwood had to take on more classes and did not have the time to continue ABL. Mrs. Moynahan said ABL pulls things out of kids that traditional classrooms and curriculum does not.

Mr. Wolf stated that if we already had an ABL program doesn't that show that we don't need to pay for someone to get their PhD to re-start an ABL program. If we see the benefits get information from other schools doing it and just start it again and use the money for that.

The Public Session Closed

The motion on the table was to deny Ms. Ellwood's paid sabbatical. Vote: In favor – Mr. Grant, Ms. Anderson; Opposed – Mrs. Balboni, Mr. Schwartz; Abstained – Mrs. Moynahan. Motion failed.

Mr. Schwartz asked if anyone could speak to the contract language regarding sabbatical leave. Dr. Cushing said it is based on standard language.

Mr. Schwartz said he is struggling with the expectation of the 8th grade science position. Mr. Pollet said he would defer to the contract; if Ms. Ellwood's intention was not to come back, then he would hire a great replacement for a permanent position. Dr. Cushing stated Ms. Ellwood's request and desire indicates her intent to come back citing her long history with RJH.

Mr. Grant said it seems unfair to students and there is a lot being built on the hope of getting grants to fund the large cost of ABL.

Ms. Anderson made a motion, seconded by Mr. Grant for discussion, to completely deny Ms. Ellwood's sabbatical request.

Discussion followed. Ms. Anderson said she is proposing denial of the sabbatical; paid or unpaid. She said Mr. Wolf's comments resonate with her, and we should let Ms. Ellwood go pursue her dream if that's what she wants to do. Ms. Anderson feels Ms. Ellwood's actions indicate she wants to be elsewhere.

Mrs. Balboni said the CBA states the teacher can apply for sabbatical and she doesn't think it is a

good idea to completely deny the request given the contract language.

Ms. Anderson said her greatest concern is hiring a top-quality replacement.

Mrs. Moynahan asked if it is possible for Ms. Ellwood to pursue her PhD while teaching. Mr. Pollet said that it is not possible based on the time and research required for the dissertation.

Mr. Schwartz made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Moynahan for a five minute break at 9:50 a.m. Vote: Unanimously approved.

The meeting reconvened at 9:55 a.m.

Mrs. Moynahan said she has no problem granting a sabbatical but she is opposed to a paid sabbatical.

The motion on the table was to completely deny Ms. Ellwood's sabbatical request.

Vote: In favor – Ms. Anderson; Opposed – Mr. Grant, Mrs. Moynahan, Mrs. Balboni, and Mr. Schwartz. Motion failed.

Mrs. Moynahan made a motion, seconded by Mr. Grant for discussion, to grant Ms. Ellwood a one (1)-year unpaid sabbatical for the 2010 – 2011 school year.

Discussion followed. Mr. Schwartz restated his concern about holding the 8th grade science teaching position if Ms. Ellwood doesn't envision coming back to this role.

Mrs. Balboni said she looks at it in terms of the contract and sees a teacher grasping the opportunity to further her degree to benefit our Rye students.

Mr. Grant said there is minimal risk with an unpaid sabbatical as the teacher would repay the premium if she decided to not return. He said the greater risk is not having the very best teacher during Ms. Ellwood's absence.

Mrs. Balboni believes we are more likely to secure a high-quality replacement if it were to cover a two-year sabbatical but she is opposed to an unpaid sabbatical.

Mr. Grant withdrew his second and Mrs. Moynahan amended her motion, seconded by Mr. Grant, to grant Ms. Ellwood a two (2)-year unpaid sabbatical. Vote: In favor – Mr. Grant, Mrs. Moynahan, Mr. Schwartz; Opposed – Mrs. Balboni and Ms. Anderson. Motion carried.

Ms. Anderson made a motion, seconded for discussion by Mr. Grant, to restrict consideration of the vote. Vote: In favor – Ms. Anderson, Mr. Grant, Mrs. Moynahan; Opposed – Mr. Schwartz and Mrs. Balboni. Motion carried.

Mr. Grant said there were just three budget-related items remaining. He noted at the November 19th meeting the Board approved a \$10,000 building maintenance line for RES but did not do the same for RJH.

Mrs. Balboni made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Moynahan, to add RJH maintenance objectives (\$10,000) back into the budget. Vote: Unanimously approved.

Ms. Anderson made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Moynahan, to increase RES field trip admissions line by \$9,000 and RJH field trip admission line by \$6,000. Vote: Unanimously approved.

Mrs. Balboni noted the RJH budget does not fully fund Merrowvista field trip for students and she suggested revisiting the funding of RJH field trips. Mr. Pollet said the additional \$6,000 to the field trip line will allow RJH to fully fund the Merrowvista trip.

Mr. Schwartz made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Moynahan, to add \$6,000 for an Eno board at RJH.

Discussion followed. Mr. Grant asked if the Eno board serves one grade only or if it is transportable among classrooms. Mr. Pollet said the board was initially requested by the 7th and 8th grade teachers but is fully transportable. Mrs. Balboni asked if the staff can use the board in conjunction with the 1:1 laptop initiative. Mr. Pollet said the board would be used in conjunction with the laptop use and noted the board comes with a lifetime guarantee.

Mr. Grant asked the cost difference between an Eno board and Smart board. Mr. Pollet said a Smart board runs about \$2,100. Mr. Grant asked if it would be better to buy one Eno board or three Smart boards.

Ms. Anderson suggested a warrant article for all the technology items needed, with the Eno board included.

The motion on the table was to add \$6,000 for an Eno board at RJH. Vote: Unanimously approved.

Ms. Anderson made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Moynahan, to reinstate School Board stipends (\$900 each).

Discussion followed. Mrs. Moynahan said last year the stipends were removed from the budget due to the economy. She feels that given the responsibility and time commitment of School Board members, the stipends should be reinstated. She noted that as someone on a fixed income the salary is meaningful.

Ms. Anderson said she has been opposed to School Board member stipends her whole tenure, but knows that it is expensive to run for a School Board seat. Because she will be stepping down this year, she believes a reinstatement of this expense is valid to help any new person elected pay for the cost of running for the position.

Mrs. Balboni said she always thought it was okay for School Board members to receive a small stipend in general, but given the agonizing discussions regarding the sabbatical request, keeping

our budget as flat as possible, and the continuing poor economy she feels it is inappropriate to reinstate the stipends.

Mr. Schwartz stated, given the state of the economy, it doesn't make sense, but given the cost of running for office and responsibilities of a Board member he is not opposed. Mr. Schwartz also stated individual Board members can waive their salary before payment.

Mr. Grant said he would like to add language allowing Board members to waive or donate their individual stipend. He is more comfortable with the motion making it clear there is a contingency plan for Board members to waive their payment or contribute their salary back to the school(s).

Mr. Wolf said it was his understanding the whole point this year was not to add financial costs into the budget that didn't exist the prior year. He complimented the Board on their service but questioned the reinstatement of their stipends.

The motion on the table was to reinstate School Board stipends (\$900 each). Vote: Approved – Ms. Anderson, Mrs. Moynahan, and Mr. Schwartz; Opposed – Ms. Balboni; Abstained – Mr. Grant.

Over the course of the 2-day budget meeting there was an estimated \$58,000 added to the budget after \$20,349 approved reductions to the budget.

Mr. Goldman asked if this included warrant articles. Mr. Grant said it did not. Mr. Goldman said he is hopeful that items won't be put in as budget articles that should really be warrant articles (i.e. RJH library renovation).

Mr. Grant said the RJH library renovation was always designed as a warrant article. Every year the Rye School District returns excess funds and the library and energy projects were both one-offs.

Mr. Goldman suggested if there is an excess of funds at the end of the year it be used to improve the quality of staff and the outcome of students.

Mr. Grant asked if there were any other items for discussion.

Mr. Katkin reminded the Board that there was a sum of money set aside for potential warrant articles. The budget will be further reduced after receiving building aid.

Ms. Anderson encouraged the Board to continue discussions with Mrs. Lyons about the need for increased funding for PhD -level psychological testing of students in need of those services.

Ms. Anderson made a motion, seconded by Mr. Schwartz, to approve the 2010-2011 Rye School District Budget in the amount of \$11,843,517 with approved additional changes. Vote: Unanimously approved.

Mr. Grant thanked everyone for their effort to achieve a 0% budget.

Warrant Articles

There was discussion regarding a possible warrant article for technology items within the schools. Replacement of servers at the schools was discussed; specifically the possible option for leasing. After discussion, the Board determined that with the technology plan in place, and the fact that the need for new servers was not immediate, the Board could continue to stay on top of the technology needs and make recommendations or additions to the budget next year or as appropriate.

Mr. Wolf said technology is a long-term investment and the advantage of a warrant article would be a public vote. He suggested the Board include items of priority concern outside of the technology plan and encouraged a warrant article.

Mr. Goldman said the town put together a 5-year capital improvement plan and the School District could do the same if they had a 5-year technology road map/plan which could set the stage for expectations.

Mr. Schwartz thanked the public for their input and comments.

Mr. Schwartz expressed frustration at the Board level specifically regarding the motion to restrict a vote for consideration. He felt with a small five member board, to restrict the voice of other members to make a motion, was divisive.

NON-PUBLIC SESSION

On a motion by Mr. Schwartz, seconded by Mrs. Moynahan, and on a unanimous roll call vote the Board entered nonpublic session at 10:45 a.m. in accordance with RSA 91:A4 to discuss negotiations.

PUBLIC SESSION

The Board returned to public session at 11:03 a.m.

ADJOURN:

There being no further business, on a motion by Mrs. Balboni, seconded by Mr. Schwartz and voted unanimously the meeting adjourned at 11:03 a.m.

School Board Secretary