

**BOARD OF FINANCE
REGULAR MEETING – October 11, 2022
HELD ELECTRONICALLY**

PRESENT: Michael Kaelin, Stewart Koenigsberg, Sandra Arkell, Matthew Raimondi, Richard Santosky, Chris Stroup

Others Present: BOE – Superintendent Dr. Kevin Smith & Chair Deborah Low, Town Administrator Matt Knickerbocker, CFO Dawn Norton

Call to Order

Chairman Michael Kaelin called the meeting to order at 7:01 pm.

Approval of Regular Meeting Minutes of September 13, 2022

Mr. Raimondi made a motion to approve the Regular Meeting Minutes of August 9, 2022. Motion seconded by Ms. Arkell and carried 5-1 with Mr. Stroup abstaining.

Discussion with BOE – Early Forecasts for Enrollment, Staffing and Special Education – BOE Chair Debbie Low & Superintendent Dr. Kevin Smith

Mr. Kaelin began the Discussion with the BOE regarding early forecasts for enrollment, staffing and special education with BOE Chair Deborah Low & Superintendent Dr. Kevin Smith. Dr. Smith reviewed the attached presentation with the BOF which gives a preliminary outlook for the FY2024 budget and highlights issues impacting the current budget and will more than likely impact next year's proposed budget. After the presentation, discussion amongst the board, Ms. Low and Dr. Smith. Mr. Kaelin & Mr. Koenigsberg expressed their appreciation that dialogue is taking place now between the boards in advance of budget planning. Dr. Smith noted he will attend next month's BOF meeting to discuss further information requested.

Discussion with Town Administrator Matt Knickerbocker

Mr. Kaelin introduced Town Administrator Matt Knickerbocker who reviewed with the board the various projects he has undertaken since he started in the position. He also reviewed information on the revaluation, which he noted will not be taking place until October of 2023. After review, question and answer session with the BOF and Mr. Knickerbocker with CFO Dawn Norton weighing in as well.

Discussion – If and when to issue RFQ for Audit Firm

CFO Dawn Norton reviewed the process for rehiring the current auditor or issuing a request for a quote for a new auditor with Ms. Arkell providing input. Ms. Norton to return to board in January 2023 with cost estimate for staying with current auditor at which time the BOF will render a decision.

Discussion – Memo from Chris Stroup

Mr. Kaelin began the Discussion on the attached memo that was prepared by board Member Chris Stroup on budget guidance to the BOE & BOS from the BOF. Discussion amongst the board on prospect of providing guidance.

Committee Reports

Investment Committee Meeting: Mr. Stroup reviewed Investment Committee meeting that took place on August 10, 2022 noting discussed results through June 30, 2022. In summary, performance was down, but the funds were largely tracking their indices. Fund performance was largely in line with the expected index performance.

**Minutes have not been reviewed by this Board and may be subject to revision in future minutes.*

Public Comment

None.

Having no further business, the board voted to adjourn meeting at 8:52 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Jacqueline Rochester
(from video recording)

Fiscal Year 2024 Outlook Summary, Part 1.

Enrollment and Staffing

Enrollment is holding steady. May see a +/-30 student decline from '23 to '24

One staffing scenario may result in a 6.45 fte as a consequence of expiring grants and enrollment shifts

- ARP/ESSR Grants expire at the end of the 2022-2023 school year
- Anticipating 2 additional classroom fte at CM based on enrollment

We are experiencing an increase in the number of our most costly out of district placements

We anticipate a reduction in the Excess Cost Grant reimbursement that may range from \$164k-\$173k

Contract Negotiations for WEA, UPSUE, AFSCME will take place this year

Enrollment

2021-2022 Enrollment (10/21)

K-12:

3,703

Community Steps:

10

PreK:

58

Outplaced:

21

Total:

3,792

Wilton Public Schools Enrollment 2022-23														
Grade	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
June 2022	259	271	234	262	252	273	285	325	286	305	321	333	273	
October 2022	231	268	277	243	271	256	273	291	333	294	307	315	332	3,691
Milone Projection	227	270	276	239	274	254	275	288	321	278	292	306	331	
Variance	4	(2)	1	4	(3)	2	(2)	3	12	16	15	9	1	
Community Steps	12													Total Enrollment 3,789
PreK	66													
Outplaced	20													
Pending Enrollments	3	1	1	2	1	1		1	2		1	1		14

Enrollment

- Current Actual
- Milone Medium Projection
- Anticipated variance based on actual

Wilton Public Schools Projected* Enrollment 2023-24														
Grade	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
Oct 2022	231	268	277	243	271	256	273	291	333	294	307	315	332	3,691
Milone Projection(medium) '23	261	240	281	287	250	279	257	278	287	311	270	282	310	
Projected Cohort (based on actual)										330	294	307	315	3,666
Community Steps														Total Enrollment
PreK														
Outplaced														

**Enrollment confirmed 10/1; E.E. to provide projections mid-Oct.*

Enrollment by School

Miller-Driscoll				
	K	1	2	
2022	231	268	277	775
2023	261	240	281	782

Cider Mill				
	3	4	5	
2022	243	271	256	770
2023	287	250	279	816

Middlebrook				
	6	7	8	
2022	273	291	333	897
2023	257	278	287	822

Wilton High School					
	9	10	11	12	
2022	294	307	315	332	1248
2023	330	294	307	315	1246

Potential Change to Budgeted Staff

	K	1	2	3	4	5
Anticipated Class Size	261	240	281	287	250	279
Anticipated Number of Sections	13	12	14	14	12	13
Avg. Class Size	20.07	20	20.07	20.5	20.8	21.4

Classroom Staff

2.0 classroom at M-D to operating budget (from ARP grant)

2.0 classroom at CM to operating budget (new FTE - enrollment driven)

Other Certified

1.45 Intervention

1.0 SW

Potential Total: 6.45

Current ARP/ESSR Funded Staff

- 2.0 Classroom Teachers at M-D
- 1.0 Math Interventionist at CM
- .45 Academic Interventionist at M-D
- 1.0 SW (.5 ESSR II/ .5 ARP)

ARP/ESSR Grants expire at the end of the 2022-2023 school year.

Anticipated Change in Excess Cost Reimbursement

By law, the state is required to reimburse school districts for sped costs that exceed PPE by 4.5x. Recent changes to the law modified the reimbursement formula and tied reimbursement to community wealth. Consequently, Wilton will be capped at 70% of submitted costs.

We anticipate a YoY reduction in excess cost reimbursement of approximately \$165,000-\$173,000

Special Education - Out of District Placements

Account	Description	Adopted Budget	Amended Budget	YTD Encumbrance	YTD Actual	YTD Total Transaction	YTD Forecast	% Exp'd
46941	Tuition - Private	2,922,720	2,922,720	3,252,557	748,320	4,000,876	(1,078,156)	137%
46941	Excess Cost Reimbursement						1,100,000	

As a result of an increase in the number of very high cost therapeutic residential placements, our out of district tuition line is 1,078,156 over budget (as of early Sept). This is a concern because we are still in the very early part of the school year. When we budgeted this line last fall and winter, as Andrea Leonardi reported to the BOE, we anticipated an increase in the number of outplacements, but what we didn't anticipate is the substantial increase in therapeutic residential outplacements. Residential outplacements are typically two or three times the cost of day school outplacements.

Special Education: Finding Budget Efficiencies - Preschool

Under IDEA public schools are required to provide services to students with IEPs beginning at age three. We run an integrated preschool program that serves both students with special needs and their typically developing peers. Operating an integrated preschool enables us to meet our mission of providing services in an inclusive, integrated setting and meet the IDEA requirement of “Least Restrictive Environment.”

At present, 66 students are enrolled in the preschool. 44 are paying tuition and we expect to generate approximately \$325,948 in revenue. Students age into the program as they turn three. We expect the enrollment to increase over the course of the year just as it does annually.

The annual tuition for non-IEP students is \$7,500. If students choose to participate in the extended day program on Tuesdays and Thursdays the tuition is \$8,300.

Special Education: Finding Budget Efficiencies - The Collaborative Center

Over the past six years we have worked to develop a constellation of services and highly trained service providers (Special Educators, Paraprofessionals, Speech and Language Pathologists, Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists, etc) to increase the capacity of our schools to meet the needs of students with very complex learning needs ages 3-22. The Collaborative Centers are programs in each school that serve students with a range of needs including those who are on the autism spectrum. The collaborative center approach enables students to access their education in an inclusive setting and achieve their IEP goals. Our Collaborative Centers are staffed by special educators and paraprofessionals. Students receive push-in services from a range of other providers including speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists and physical therapists.

Prior to the investment in these professionals, many of these students would be placed in alternative settings with significant transportation and tuition costs. The average cost of the district program is \$135,000. Conversely, the cost of an outplacement for this population on average is \$200,000+ per year + transportation. It should be noted that the difference in cost is not a difference in the amount of or quality of direct services to students, but often the administrative overhead of the school itself (rent, utilities, administrative staff, accounting, marketing, legal fees, etc). The students are well-served and well-integrated into their communities.

We estimate the cost avoidance of this program to be anywhere from \$50,000-\$75,000 per student annually.

Special Education: Finding Budget Efficiencies - Genesis

Since its inception, Genesis has been a success in avoiding the cost of outplacement tuition for therapeutic day placements. The program serves students in grades 7-12 who, for many reasons, have had difficulty managing in the larger school environment. In addition to preventing outplacements, we have had students previously outplaced return to district because of the Genesis program. We also currently have one student from another district paying tuition to the program. We currently have 21 students enrolled, of those three students have returned from outplacements.

The estimated per pupil cost (excluding transportation) for Genesis is approximately \$35,000.

The average day school tuition plus transportation is approximately \$100,000-\$150,000. Cost avoidance for this program is on average \$65,000-\$85,000. Beyond cost avoidance, the three students who have returned from outplacements represent actual savings.

Special Education: Finding Budget Efficiencies - Community Steps

Community Steps is a program that serves our most complex learners, aged 18-22, as they transition from school to community life (including post-secondary education/training). This program continues to grow as our students age and will continue to grow in the coming years.

This program prevents the need to send students out of town for transition services. This is both fiscally sound and assists the students and their families by creating opportunities in their community for adult life. Currently there are nine students enrolled in Community Steps. We estimate that we will have 15 students in this program next year.

The estimated per pupil cost is \$47,000 (excluding transportation). The average cost of outplacement and transportation is \$120,000. We estimate cost avoidance for this program to be approximately \$60,000.

Other Considerations

- A change in the MB schedule could net a change in required FTE
- Genesis may be a smaller program next year (12 current seniors)
- PK enrollment will determine the need to continue with a 6th class

Next Update

Facilities

Utilities

Transportation

Other Contracted Services

Board of Finance

Sorry for missing last two meetings—I'll attend October 11.

I watched the recording of the September 13 meeting. Based on that discussion and the meetings I attended earlier this year where we deliberated the 2022-2023 budget, I believe:

- We should provide guidance (to the other Boards and to the voters) on the aggregate maximum net spending we would be prepared to support.
 - The guidance should consider estimates of the grants and other monies Wilton receives from the Federal and State governments
 - The guidance should ignore anticipated changes in the grand list due to updated valuations (net increases in counts)
- The communication of the guidance should state clearly that the BoF is not making a determination of budgets and taxation at this stage; the budgets and mil rate to be presented to the voters next spring require analysis and deliberation that will continue up the moment the BoF votes next spring. The BoF endorsed budgets may be more or less than those implied by the guidance we provide now.
- I am optimistic that a singular (or limited range) maximum net spending target can win the support of at least 4 members of the BoF (at least two of you on September 13 expressed views on unacceptable tax increases).
- I believe providing guidance now will improve the efficiency of this year's budget process and also encourage voters to share their views early in the budget process.