

Minutes of the School Programs Subcommittee of the Override Study Committee

Meeting Date: January 3, 2018

Time: 5:00 p.m.

Location: Room408, Town Hall

Members Present: Cliff Brown (chair), Heather Hamilton, Charles Terrell, Meggan Levene, and Harold Petersen.

Staff Present: Mary Ellen Dunn, Deputy Superintendent of Schools, and Sam Zimmerman, Deputy Superintendent for Student Services, Brookline Public Schools.

Others Present: Julie Schreiner-Oldham also attended the meeting, as a member of the School Committee and a member of the Override Study Committee. Mark Gray attended as a member of the public.

It was noted that the name of the subcommittee had been changed from School Programs and Capacity to Pay to School Programs, since capacity to pay would now be a part of the work of the Municipal Subcommittee.

Mr. Brown introduced Mr. Zimmerman and asked him to give an overview of his responsibilities, with particular attention to the Special Education Program.

Mr. Zimmerman gave an in-depth survey of the Special Education Program, including what is mandated by state law and how Brookline has responded. He described Brookline's program as "state of the art." By and large, we are doing an excellent job, but the program is expensive. It is likely that costs will continue to grow, both because of mandated services and because Brookline both retains and attracts families with children who need these services.

Mr. Zimmerman discussed a number of steps that are being taken to achieve greater efficiencies in the program. Ms. Schreiner-Oldham responded that she hoped this would not mean a diminution of services for children who need them. Mr. Zimmerman responded that no, this would not be the case.

Mary Ellen Dunn offered the view that there is no limit to what could be done to improve the educational experience of children, but that there is a budget limitation. Mr. Petersen responded that there is no limit to what could be done with respect to all the services provided by the town and the schools, but that there is a limit to how much the taxpayers are willing to pay. He went on to say that in his mind efficiency is not a bad word. It has too often been used to describing a mindless slashing of costs, but what it really means is doing the best we can with the resources available.

It was the sense of the discussion that both Mary Ellen Dunn and Sam Zimmerman are working very hard in an effort to achieve efficiencies in this sense of the word—doing the best we can with the resources available.

The meeting adjourned at 7:00 p.m.

