

## **Minutes of the School Programs Subcommittee of the Override Study Committee**

Date: January 24, 2018

Time: 5:00 p.m.

Location: Room 111, Town Hall

Members Present: Heather Hamilton, Michael Sandman and Harold Petersen. Charles Terrell has taken extended leave from the subcommittee due to pending surgery, and Meggan Levene was unable to attend.

Staff Present: Andrew Bott, Superintendent of Schools, Mary Ellen Dunn, Deputy Superintendent of Schools for Administration and Finance, Sam Zimmerman, Deputy Superintendent of Schools for Student Services, Nicole Gittens, Deputy Superintendent of schools for Teaching and Learning, and Ben Lummis, Special Assistant to the Superintendent for Strategy and Performance.

Others Present: David Pollak, Chair of the School Committee, Julie Schreiner-Oldham, member of the School Committee and a member of the Override Study Committee, Betsy DeWitt, member of the Override Study Committee, Jeff Rudolph, member of the Override Study Committee, and also members of the public Mark Gray and Ryan Ballenger.

The chair welcomed Michael Sandman as a newly-appointed member of the subcommittee.

Minutes: The minutes of the meetings of December 13, 2017 and of January 17, 2018, were approved as submitted. Mr. Sandman abstained in the vote, since he had not been on the subcommittee for those meetings.

Financial Assistance: Mary Ellen Dunn gave a presentation on Financial Assistance Policy. For some years the schools have provided free or reduced-fee lunch for students of families who qualify under terms determined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. This program has been orderly and subject to strict guidelines. But financial assistance has also been provided in a rather haphazard fashion for field trips, instrumental music, athletics, and other fee-based activities. In some cases the fee charged was more than the cost of the program so as to provide funds for those who either would not or could not pay. Some of the PTO's contributed toward the cost of financial assistance. Some parents voluntarily paid more to help those who could not pay. In other cases, students would forego a program such as instrumental music or an athletic team because they did not have the money and either did not know whom to ask or did not want to ask. Moreover, it was never quite clear that those who received the aid were those who most needed it. Nor was it clear who might have been left out due to a failure to ask.

In the past year the school department has adopted substantial reforms. Now parents file a single application for financial assistance and a student who qualifies is marked paid, just as is any student whose parents have paid the full price. The process is confidential and is designed to bring both order and equity. The criteria for receiving aid are based on Federal Poverty Guidelines. Parents who pay the full fee are now charged just the cost of the program, but they are still asked to consider a voluntary contribution to help pay for financial assistance to others. An explanation of the program, including income limits for assistance, and an application form are available both online and in paper form. The school department estimates that approximately 9% of the students will receive assistance

of some amount, with an average amount of \$250 per student, for a total cost per year of \$175,000. This is a new item in the budget but it is not entirely a new cost, since some of it was borne in the past by parents and PTO's.

Special Education: Sam Zimmerman followed up his earlier visit to the subcommittee with additional information on the costs of special education. Brookline has approximately 300 students in K-12 with IEP's (Individualized Education Program), which is a written education plan designed to meet a child's needs and may be unique to each student.. The number of students with an IEP has remained a roughly constant fraction of the student body, but the financial burden on the schools has increased due to the failure of the state to meet its promised share of the cost.

Response to Intervention: Nicole Gittens explained to those present what we mean by "Response to Intervention" and what is being asked for in the forthcoming budget. About 80% of our incoming students do just fine with the usual introduction to school. But about 15% need a bit more help and perhaps 5% need intensive intervention. Perhaps a child has not become accustomed to reading in the home and thus is behind the others on entering school. Others may have behavioral issues that can be corrected with a timely and appropriate response. The Response to Intervention approach is aimed at early identification of issues that might impede a student's learning in the hope that a quick, short, intervention will solve the problem, and in doing so will enable the student to learn effectively without going the route of a Special Education Program. The schools are requesting an amount of \$100,000 for full implementation of the Response to Intervention model.

The chair noted that this would be the last meeting of the subcommittee. Members of the subcommittee will be reporting directly to the full committee on topics for which they have taken responsibility.

The meeting adjourned at 6:30 p.m.