

**Groton Dunstable Regional Schools
School Committee Business Meeting Minutes
February 2, 2005**

PRESENT:

Ms Cindy Barrett
Ms Karen Lofgren
Mr. Chuck McKinney, Vice-Chair
Mr. Frank O'Connell
Mr. Alan Vervaeke, Chair

ABSENT:

Ms Judy Converse
Ms Patricia Murray, Secretary

ADMINISTRATION:

Dr. Mary Athey Jennings, Superintendent
Mr. Craig Young, Business Manager
Dr. Susan Rubel, Director of Curriculum/Staff Development

Student Advisor:

Erica Schroeder

STAFF, PRESS, OTHERS: J. Kulesz, Groton Herald; P. Comtois, Groton Landmark; J. Dillon, B. Raucci, P. Myerson, J. Mitchell, B. Morgan-White, K. Tuomi, B. Dinsmore, L. Zimmaro, J. Endicott, G. Baker, P. Maynard, B. Lavin, J. Twomey

CALL TO ORDER

The GDRSC Meeting was called to order at 7:18 p.m. by the chair, A. Vervaeke.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Dr. Jennings announced Kindergarten registration is taking place at Florence Roche next week from 9:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. each day.

Due to the snow day on January 26th, Dr. Jennings announced the results of the Youth At Risk Survey will be presented on February 9th at 9:30 a.m. at the Performing Arts Center.

Dr. Jennings announced they will be celebrating Girls and Women in Sports Day on February 4th. They will be honoring Groton Dunstable alumni and several exemplary women athletes.

Dr. Jennings announced Florence Roche's second grade concert will be held at 7:00 p.m. on February 10th at the Performing Arts Center.

Dr. Jennings recognized the work done by Steve Byrne and his maintenance crew during the recent snow storms. A snow globe was presented to Mr. Byrne.

A. Vervaeke announced School Representative Mike Fredrickson scored his one hundredth hockey point last week and this is quite an achievement. It was noted this was a record for a Groton Dunstable player.

A. Vervaeke announced copies of the brochure for the superintendent search are available this evening.

E. Schroeder announced GD Cares for the tsunami relief effort is continuing. They are selling hearts and bracelets and have raised almost \$3500. They hope to reach \$5000 very soon. A benefit concert will be held tomorrow night at 7:00 p.m. in the Performing Arts Center. Ms Schroeder gave Committee members a bracelet.

E. Schroeder announced sixty middle school students are participating in the annual Middle School Talent Show which will be held at 7:00 p.m. on February 17th. All proceeds will be donated to the tsunami relief effort.

K. Lofgren announced SPED PAC will hold an IEP workshop on February 8th at 7:00 p.m. in the high school library. Dr. Sandy Jones will speak at their March 8th meeting on the different reading programs that are available.

K. Lofgren announced each classroom at Florence Roche had a jar for collecting spare change and they raised in excess of \$4,000 for the tsunami relief effort. She thanked Ms Somers for organizing this fundraiser.

Dr. Rubel announced Erica Schroeder was accepted today to the University of Rochester.

A. Vervaeke feels they will see that they have an extraordinarily giving school district and he would like to hear the total amount of money raised through all these efforts.

MINUTES

C. BARRETT MOVED TO APPROVE THE BUSINESS MEETING MINUTES OF JANUARY 19, 2005.
SECONDED BY F. O'CONNELL

In Favor: F. O'Connell, A. Vervaeke, C. Barrett, K. Lofgren

Abstention: C. McKinney

REPORTS FROM SUB-COMMITTEES

Personnel & Negotiations - C. McKinney reported they will be meeting at Tarbell on February 9th at 11:30 a.m. The contracts for Unit D have been signed.

Policy - C. McKinney reported they will be meeting at Tarbell on February 9th at 1:00 p.m.

Communications - C. McKinney reported they will be meeting at Tarbell on February 9th at 9:00 a.m.

Superintendent Search - A. Vervaeke announced the following people have been assigned to the Screening Committee:

Groton Town Representative - Peter Cunningham (Board of Selectmen)

Dunstable Town Representative - Daniel St. Jean (Advisory Board)

Student Representative - Erica Schroeder (changed to Rachel Latario)

Central Administration - Dr. Rubel

Administrative Council - Launa Zimmaro (Florence Roche Principal)

High School Teacher - Ellen Barkhuff

Middle School Teacher - Nicki Rockwell

Elementary School Teacher - Beverly Clark (Florence Roche)

Sped PAC - Nancy Bugbee

School Committee Liaison - Cindy Barrett

Vice chairman McKinney drew names from a hat for the names of the Seniors representative as well as the parent representatives:

Seniors - Berta Erickson

High School Parent - Lisa Chrisis

Middle School Parent - Peter O'Sullivan

Elementary School Parent - Colleen Morrisson

A. Vervaeke thanked everyone who submitted their name for consideration. Dates and times will be announced.

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

J. Twomey, community representative on the Middle School Council, thanked Principal Raucci, her staff, support personnel, students and their parents for their outstanding contribution to the Community Children's Fund. Through their Project Mitten, they raised over \$7,000 which was turned over to the Commissioners of the Trust. They fund children's activities and support children in need, particularly during the holidays, but also during the school year. He said it has been great serving on the Council and noted it is an outstanding school and they do an outstanding job.

C. McKinney stated the chair has asked that the meeting with the Joint Budget Task Force be moved from the scheduled meeting of February 15th to March 1st. He asked the chair to reconsider this and allow the School Committee to discuss the budget and its larger parameters this evening and see what progress they make. He is concerned that if they do not meet with them in February and jointly let them ask questions, find out what issues they are having on their sides of the budget and give them feedback from tonight's discussion, that they will be into March and there will be less flexibility. He urged the chair to reinstate the meeting of February 15th.

A. Vervaeke said the discussion time for the budget has been increased to two hours and he will leave it to the consensus of the Committee as to whether they should meet on February 15th or leave it until March 1st.

**C. MCKINNEY MOVED TO SUSPEND THE RULES TO CONSIDER TWO FIELD TRIP APPROVALS. SECONDED BY C. BARRETT
SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY**

VOTE: Middle School Trip

Principal Raucci said the Washington, DC trip has been a long standing tradition as an eighth grade trip. It is tied to their eighth grade curriculum and this is why the trip has changed over the years. They no longer study the early colonies and Jamestown and areas in Virginia have been eliminated. They expect to leave at 6:00 a.m. on June 6th and return at 6:00 p.m. on June 10th. The entire eighth grade class is encouraged to go and families needing financial assistance may contact the school as it is their goal to give every child the opportunity to experience the trip. She noted most of the eighth grade teachers go as chaperones as well as parent volunteers and the ratio is 10:1.

**C. MCKINNEY MOVED THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE APPROVE THE EIGHTH GRADE TRIP TO WASHINGTON, D.C. AS OUTLINED IN OUR PACKET.
SECONDED BY K. LOFGREN
SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY**

VOTE: High School Varsity Hockey Tournament - Cape Cod

Principal Dillon stated this is an event the boys hockey team has been involved with over the past few years. This year they are in a very competitive tournament with some of the strongest teams in southeastern Mass. They will travel by Laidlaw Transportation, leaving on February 24th and returning about noon on February 26th. Chaperones have completed their necessary checks. He noted this is a nice opportunity for the team.

**C. MCKINNEY MOVED THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE APPROVE THE VARSITY HOCKEY TOURNAMENT TRIP ON FEBRUARY 24TH, 25TH AND 26TH AS OUTLINED IN THEIR PACKET.
SECONDED BY C. BARRETT
SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY**

PRESENTATIONS/DISCUSSION

Superintendent Search: Focus Group Results

NESDEC consultant Gary Baker reviewed his report that summarizes the comments from seventy-five different people from the schools and communities. The information was received in ten focus group meetings held between January 10th and January 13th.

Mr. Baker stated two questions were addressed: 1) What qualifications would you like to see in a new superintendent of schools? and 2) What issues should the new superintendent of school address in his/her first year on the job? His report lists the groups separately with their comments put in priority order. The report summarizes all ten focus groups with what he believes were the most frequently stated comments on the qualities a new superintendent should have. A copy of the Successful Candidate Profile is attached to these minutes. He stated this will be used by the Screening Committee and by the School Committee in generating the questions and doing the research on the candidates.

Over the next few weeks, Mr. Baker stated they will be collecting requests for applications and noted twenty have all ready been received. The Screening Committee will meet on February 28th to review the recommended eight to ten people to be interviewed. They will interview those people in the middle of March and out of that group, three or four will be presented to the School Committee in alphabetical order by last name. The School Committee will conduct interviews and members have the option of visiting the district where the candidate is from. They can also have the candidates come to Groton Dunstable for a visit and give them an opportunity to meet with various people in the communities and district. The Committee will make a decision in April.

A. Vervaeke asked what time the Screening Committee will meet on the 28th and how many meetings will take place during the week of the 14th to the 19th. Mr. Baker said the meeting on February 28th will take about two hours and it was agreed it will be from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Typically the Screening Committee interviews two or three nights and the interviews last about 45 minutes with 15 minutes allotted for taking notes. Sometimes Screening Committees like to do four interviews on a Saturday.

A. Vervaeke noted the Screening Committee meetings are not open to the public because information being reviewed is confidential and no names will be released until recommendations are made to the School Committee. Mr. Baker stated the School Committee makes the names public. A. Vervaeke stated that while the School Committee is drafting people to serve on the Screening Committee, they are not a sub-committee of the School Committee. Mr. Baker said it is not a formal meeting of the School Committee, it is a meeting run by NESDEC. Everything is public after the three finalists are announced. A. Vervaeke will email the names of the Screening Committee members as well as contact information to Mr. Baker.

C. McKinney asked if the Screening Committee needs a formal appointment vote by the School Committee. A. Vervaeke said a vote will make them their sub-committee. They chose to say they wanted to have a Screening Committee for the purpose of screening applicants and he does not think they have to formally charge them. C. McKinney said they would not change the process by formally appointing them. K. Lofgren read the Screening Committee Policy and it states the School Committee will appoint a temporary Screening Committee. A. Vervaeke advised they will be required to take executive session minutes. C. McKinney stated the meetings would be posted as executive session meetings.

C. MCKINNEY MOVED THE GROTON DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE APPOINT THE FOLLOWING INDIVIDUALS TO THE SCREENING COMMITTEE: PETER CUNNINGHAM, DANIEL ST. JEAN, BERTA ERICKSON, RACHEL LATARIO, SUSAN RUBEL, LAUNA ZIMMARO, ELLEN BARKHUFF, NIKI ROCKWELL, BEVERLY CLARK, NANCY BUGBEE, LISA CHRISIS, PETER O'SULLIVAN AND COLLEEN MORRISSON.
SECONDED BY CINDY BARRETT
SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

Mr. Baker encouraged Committee members to let him know as soon as possible if any issues develop.

Budget: Goals 2 and 3, Operating Budget

Goal 2: To support the development of the whole student

Goal 3: To retain and support quality staff

Dr. Rubel stated the Action Teams for these two goals combined efforts and developed two objectives: 1) Use student performance data to assess student progress and 2) Improve student learning by strengthening instructional practices and programs. She stated these objectives are guiding their efforts in terms of what they are doing in the schools and in focusing their

budget planning. With respect to the Strategic Plan draft members had received in December, Dr. Rubel distributed copies of a revised technology plan and an Early Childhood Plan.

Dr. Rubel summarized some of the main areas that reflect the strategic plan efforts in the budget. In FY06, they hope to add a full time certified librarian at the elementary level, a .33 foreign language coordinator, a 1.0 learning center math specialist at the high school and provide full funding of the elementary band staffing. She stated the band fees do not fully cover the staffing costs and about \$12,000 is being requested. It was noted this would be in addition to the approximately \$12,000 they currently receive from band fees.

They have several professional development activities planned to take place next year. Money is being set aside for curriculum writing which is for summer curriculum development work and they need to offer workshops in science and social studies at the elementary level, and possibly at the middle school level, because they have a number of teachers who are not "highly qualified" in those areas as required by the NCLB act. They are putting a large part of the professional development monies, that is content related, into ELA/literacy and math at all levels. They have some professional development to train a high school teacher in AP physics, some health professional development for some new programs at the elementary and middle schools and ongoing special education professional development.

Other expenses include developing benchmark assessments, textbook purchases in a variety of areas, resources for elementary social studies, digital and video cameras at the high school and an increase in the per pupil supply allocation in the fine arts program. Because of the addition of the fifth grade at the middle school, there are additional costs associated with drama productions.

Dr. Rubel stated the Strategic Plan speaks to not just the curriculum budget but also to every school's budget, the PPS budget, the library/technology budget and grants. She stated forty-seven percent of the Strategic Plan budget is being contributed by the schools, eighteen percent by the curriculum budget, thirteen percent by the library media technology budget, twelve percent by the PPS budget and about ten percent by grants.

The total budget effort for Goals 2 and 3 is \$446,132.

K. Lofgren asked what the allotted amount is for EEC and Dr. Rubel said \$2,700 has been allocated for general academic support.

Dr. Rubel stated there are some increases in salaries, most of which reflect current costs that were under estimated when the budget was approved last year. A .5 Human Resources secretary has been added midyear this year which is reflected in the FY06 budget. A .33 foreign language coordinator is also reflected in the elementary Foreign Language line item. The justification for the increases in professional development are due to the strategic planning work, the NCLB requirements and less grant money coming in. She reviewed a chart comparing grant allocations in FY04 and FY05 and stated they received \$77,351 less in FY05. They anticipate receiving \$175,518 in FY06 as compared to \$206,493 in FY05 and \$283,844 in FY04.

Barbara Morgan-White, Director of Educational Technology/Library and Media Services, reviewed her portion of the FY06 budget. She stated technology is the accelerator within the Strategic Plan.

Ms Morgan-White reviewed her goals and accomplishments in 2004/2005. They did a WAN upgrade to a T1, introduced the Student Information System and created an online help desk to capture repair and maintenance efforts. A five through twelve technology specialist was added, new technology was infused into the renovation of the middle school, the website was redesigned and they are still working on getting the district's equipment and software inventory into a centrally located database.

A chart comparing technology and the number of students and staff from 2000 to 2005 was reviewed. Computers have increased by eighty-eight percent, technology infrastructure has increased with one hundred percent of the classrooms having internet connections, they have gone from ten to twenty-two servers and from one wireless cart with twelve computers to eighteen carts with over two hundred computers. The number of students increased by over four hundred and the number of staff increased by eighty-six. The library infrastructure went from a site-based system to a centralized automated system. Ms Morgan-White reviewed staffing ratios. DOE has recommended staffing for technology and library. The benchmark is to have one full time technician to every one hundred fifty computers and the goal would be to have seven technicians for their eleven hundred computers. She said this does not include printers and peripherals which they also maintain and repair. They currently have one technician for seven hundred thirty-three computers and a .5 for three hundred sixty-seven computers. Adding a technician in FY 06 will put the ratio to 1:440 each and the .5 to 220 computers.

The benchmark ratio for an Instructional Technology Specialist is one to sixty teaching staff and the goal would be 3.75 to two hundred twenty-five teaching staff. They currently have one ITS who works with one hundred-twenty staff members at the middle school and high school and there is no one at the elementary school. A request for an additional ITS has not been made for FY06 but will be requested in FY07 for the elementary school. Ms Morgan-White stated this is very important when you talk about the transition of the knowledge of technology between the elementary and middle schools.

The budget requests a certified elementary librarian. The benchmark ratio is one to every five hundred students and with almost three thousand students, they should have 5.8 certified librarians. There is currently one at the high school, one at the middle school and none at the elementary schools. A. Vervaeke

asked the difference between a certified librarian and the ones they have in the elementary schools. Ms Morgan-White said certified librarians have a degree in Library Science and they work with the teachers, students and the curriculum. Dr. Rubel added the current library staff at the elementary schools are library aides and while they have experience, they do not have the formal background.

Ms Morgan-White said they are not attempting to reach the benchmark goals but are trying to reach the goal of being able to service better and to maintain the equipment and technology infrastructure. For FY06, salaries have increased 31.3%, a new line item has been added for professional development and computer support and supplies have increased by 13.24%. There is a large one time increase for a five year replacement cycle of three library workstations in the elementary schools and the data and web servers that were purchased when the library automation system came into place. The warranty will end in August and the district will incur any costs associated with repairs or replacement. The FY06 budget request is \$522,355.

A. Vervaeke asked who recommends the purchase of library books and Ms Morgan-White said Ms Gilmartin is very helpful in this process as well as the library specialists. The book companies and curriculum department also make recommendations. He asked if it makes more sense to have all library purchases centralized on her budget sheet rather than being broken down on a school by school basis. Ms Morgan-White said no since each school's needs are different.

Joan Endicott, Director of Pupil Personnel, stated her FY06 budget will increase by 9.36%. The goal of the budget is to provide for related services, accommodations, support services and unanticipated expenses. She stated no new initiatives have been proposed except to purchase an IEP software system. The out-of-district expenditures, staff salaries and the NECC ABA program are the biggest increases. The FY06 budget request is \$1,827,249. She reviewed the percentage of budget expenditures for FY04 - FY05.

Ms Endicott stated nineteen students are currently placed out and three students are projected to go out of the district by the end of the school year. The projected increase to the out-of-district budget is \$65,818 which is the combined cost for collaborative tuition and private school tuition. The anticipated reimbursement for FY06 will be \$500,000. Based on the Circuit Breaker formula, the district's net tuition cost would be \$32,225 per student. She noted they will not know until spring if private school tuitions will increase.

Ms Endicott reviewed a comparison of out-of-district enrollment for FY00 through FY05.

The nineteen students currently placed out represent about 7% of the total SPED population and she noted this percentage is lower than most towns which usually range from ten to twelve percent for out -of-district placements.

Ms Endicott stated the FY05 budget for the ABA Program is underfunded due to increased costs in consultant services and contracted services and costs for this program will increase by \$40,000 in FY06. NECC is asking for a 3% increase in their tuition and some contract services will be extended as students transition to other schools.

Ms Endicott stated they propose to fund the extended year services, which is the summer component for students, through the FY06 budget. It is anticipated the cost will be \$67,000, which is mostly salary based, and provides services for approximately sixty students. She noted this service was previously paid by a federal grant. K. Lofgren asked if the grant is no longer available and Ms Endicott said they made some decisions to spend the grant differently.

A. Vervaeke said it is hard to compare apples to apples when the budget numbers do not reflect how much was actually spent since the grants are not reflected.

Grant expenditures were reviewed and Ms Endicott stated 87% was spent on salaries and covered 2.5 team chairs, one speech therapist, a secretary, nine aides and 1.5 LD teachers. Ten percent was spent on contracted services and three percent covered travel and miscellaneous expenses. Ms Endicott stated \$594,663 was received in federal grant money for FY05. The grant is based on a dollar value per SPED student.

A slide showing the utilization of grant funds over the last four years was reviewed and it was noted the majority of the funds are used for salaries. This allows them to be creative and adaptive when situations come up mid year.

A. Vervaeke said he would like to see every expense and identify the offset of grant money. He feels this will reflect what the true budget really is and how the money is being spent. With respect to salaries, only the amount above the grant is reflected in the budget. C. McKinney stated the Committee will get a personnel spreadsheet. If they ever get into issues with grants, he feels there would be exposure in the general fund budget for salaries covered by grants. He said he has had numerous conversations with Mr. Young about this and shares Mr. Vervaeke's concerns but noted the way it is done is not misaligned with any other town departments that get state and/or federal funding.

A. Vervaeke said they have automatic salary increases every year without an automatic increase in the grant. Ms Endicott said they may not be able to fund some of the positions or they may not need some of the positions. This is looked at year by year.

C. Young said a FY05 budget spreadsheet was provided at the first joint financial committee meeting that showed all costs broken down by the various funds. In municipal accounting, he stated voters vote on the general fund as this is the portion that impacts the taxpayers. They do not have direct input, through a vote, on the use of other funds.

C. Young noted the Committee receives a quarterly report on all those funds and Budget and Finance receives a monthly update so the accountability and reporting are in place.

With respect to the status of grant funded employees, they enjoy they same benefits and treatment that other bargaining members receive. If funding was lost in a particular area, the district would have an obligation to that individual based on their tenure and seniority.

K. Lofgren said grants are not reflected in any information the Committee receives and asked if they could be reported the way general revenues are reported. C. Young said they could but the dilemma is in the timing since they do not receive notification of their grants until the spring. Grants are reported to the Committee when they come in.

F. O'Connell asked how the grant money previously spent on the summer program will now be spent. Ms Endicott said the commitment for the grant is for staffing.

K. Lofgren asked if \$100,000 has been reserved in E&D for the SPED contingency and

C. Young does not recall they set a specific dollar value but rather said E&D will be their SPED contingency. Since outside tuitions are high, she asked Ms Endicott to explain the costs associated with students having to go out-of-district. Ms Endicott said the district tries to provide maximum resources to help students access the curriculum. Most of the out-of-district students are those with severe emotional involvement. The larger education setting is too stressful and there are too many variables for providing support across all school settings. Some students benefit from a small school setting with therapeutic supports across all school settings. These settings must also maintain the curriculum resources and align with frameworks. Out-of-district students are not exempt from MCAS. The goal is to bring students back when they are able to manage in the regular education setting.

A. Vervaeke asked the legal costs to date. Ms Endicott said they have spent about \$10,000 and anticipates another set of bills close to this amount.

C. Young distributed copies of a three year budget forecast for FY2005 through FY2007.

He stated budget forecasting for one year is generally difficult but was made easier because it is tied to a Strategic Plan with definable goals in dollars and personnel.

The budget generally changes six to eight percent a year. The district tends to grow at around 3+% per year in student enrollment, with the average being 3.84%. They have used 3.7% for the next two years and the increase in students means additional services and staff. Annual increases can also be caused by new facilities. The FY06 operating budget is showing a 9.3% increase with debt at .7%. Debt will decrease to .5% in FY07 with the sale of bonds. The requested FY06 budget amount is \$32,637,872.

C. Young said state revenues are relatively flat and taxpayers are bearing the increased costs. He noted they are bumping up against a Prop 2 1/2 limit every year.

Major impacts to the budget include a 15% increase in health and dental insurance costs, a 5% increase in energy costs and a 3% increase in general expenses. They are requesting \$352,525, which includes

benefits, for staffing positions. There will also be additional costs for transportation. In FY07, personnel additions will total \$558,800.

C. McKinney asked how changes in SBA funding will impact the budget.

C. Young said they will probably bond in November 2006. C. McKinney asked if there were additional payments that were meant to be made when the new SBA system came in that were to prepay the old debt.

C. Young said the old funding law was a true reimbursement and has recently been changed. It is no longer reported on the state Cherry Sheet. They now give 67% up front which reduces the amount of money that has to be borrowed and interest costs are lower because they have less principal.

C. McKinney asked the implication for the town's budgets based on receiving those payments. C. Young said this is all excluded debt so taxpayers will get a break because the interest rates will be lower. He noted is also good for their bond rating to have less bonded debt. This also plays into E&D. When they go to bond in November, he stated with healthy financial statements and good audits, Moody's will give them a strong rating which will be enjoyed when they sell the bonds. He noted the rating would be lower if they maintained a lower or no E&D balance.

F. O'Connell asked Mr. Young to comment on revenue projections. C. Young said he took the numbers from House Bill One and what this would mean if they stayed below the Prop 2 1/2 threshold. Revenues would be \$31,076,078, a 2.64% increase over this year. This means there is about \$800,000 of real dollar valued growth to stay under Prop 2 1/2.

C. McKinney said reducing debt assessment is bottom line tax dollars for both towns and taxpayers need to recognize this lowers their tax bill. He said they are ultimately going to ask for some of this back.

C. McKinney said they are facing a gap of \$1.2M to \$1.5M between forecasted revenues and forecasted expenditures. He feels they need to initiate discussions and open up everyone's creating thinking as early as possible on ways to address this gap. He would like to meet with the FinComs and Joint Budget Committee as soon as possible. He would like the School Committee to discuss whether an override should be an option to cover the gap if the towns are not able to help or whether they should start taking money out of E&D.

Dr. Jennings is concerned the School Committee as a whole has not discussed what they would like to add or delete from the budget. She feels they need to be prepared to answer questions when they meet with the towns. As a whole, the Committee has not said they support the idea of asking to use the towns' stabilization funds. They also need to decide what percentage or dollar amount should be freed up from E&D. It is anticipated E&D will be certified at about \$1.5M. Dr. Jennings said time is set aside at the February 16th meeting for members to discuss the budget and the budget public hearing will also be held that night.

K. Lofgren feels they should meet with the towns as soon as possible and feels communication can also be achieved through listening.

A. Vervaeke feels the consensus is not to consider an override for FY06. He stated the majority of budget increases are for items they have no control over or for contractual obligations. He feels they could take some maintenance costs out of E&D but does not feel they can justify taking operating costs since they would have to come up with a replacement for those funds the following year. He feels they need to take a hard look at the budget and re-examine the goals coming out of the vision statement. He would like to avoid "cherry picking" the budget like they did last year which put them in conflict with the administrative council. He stated the situation gets worse every year. He stated the School Committee appreciates the vision and what they are trying to accomplish.

K. Lofgren agrees an override does not seem to be the route they should go. She understands they have agreed to budget E&D as unanticipated special education costs and for that reason, they do not want to deplete it. She asked if they do not want to have an E&D balance to improve their bond ratings which in turn will give taxpayers lower interest rates. Dr. Jennings said this is a good point and urged the Committee to decide what they want to use E&D for prior to meeting with the towns. She asked if the meeting with the FinComs is to get input on how the budget should be cut. She asked the Committee if they are prepared at this time to talk with the towns about creative financing.

A. Vervaeke is hoping to get input from the towns to see if really they intend to support maintenance and capital items from stabilization. He stated this was mentioned when the towns readily shot down the district's desire to have a stabilization fund. He said they are not going to give the E&D money back and he hopes there is a clear understanding that this is their free cash/stabilization fund, is what protects them and gives them their bond rating.

F. O'Connell said they originally set up these joint budget meetings so everyone would have an idea of what they were up against. He feels they need to meet with them on February 15th and discover what they can from the towns' side of things. He said he would be hard pressed to come up with a reason at this time to support an override. He has heard even their staunch supporters will have a hard time supporting a suggestion of an override.

C. Barrett agrees they should go to the meeting and find out where the towns stand and then be prepared to make drastic revisions.

C. McKinney said the first joint meeting with the towns was to talk about assumptions and the second meeting in February was scheduled with both FinComs to explain the budget. While he is not specifically advocating for an override, he pointed out they took a three year forecast and it was very clear last year they may be able to get by if they asked for a small override amount. He stated they estimated they would need an override this year, noting the \$1.5M gap does not fit inside the towns' assessments under Prop 2 1/2. He is also hearing Groton cannot fit everything in they want and they may need an override too. He does not want to pretend the need is not there. Asking for an override would be very unpleasant and in a

perfect world, they be able to sit on their E&D. Since this is not a perfect world, he said they have to be prepared to spend some of it as it shows they are finding a way to do some things that are unpleasant while asking the towns to think of creative ways to take on paying for maintenance outside of the budget. He would like the Committee to consider some flexibility. He feels these things can be initiated at the February 15th meeting.

Dr. Jennings said there was only one member from Dunstable at the last meeting and no FinCom members. At that meeting they were trying to get at what percentage of the total town budget, including stabilization, is a fair amount for the schools to expect. A decision on that was not reached. She said they are reducing the towns' debt somewhat and asked if that comes back to the schools or if it means they get a lower percentage of the towns' budget. She stated she will not advocate going in a third time on their budget. While they want to be open about their budget, she feels the School Committee needs to first decide the bottom line.

C. Young said applying E&D in a large amount in a particular year creates a hole. He feels they can view the application of E&D in the future and commit to apply an amount over two years. A. Vervaeke asked if there is a percentage to maintain their bond rating.

C. Young said Moody's likes to see a stabilized financial statement and would ask what the plan is if money is moved out of E&D to finance operating expenses. He stated Moody's looks at future trends. A. Vervaeke said they will need a source of funds for one time expenses relating to a new elementary school. He said they need to maintain a safety net with E&D.

ACTION ITEMS

See previous votes

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

None

ADJOURNMENT:

C. MCKINNEY MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 10:23 P.M.

SECONDED BY F. O'CONNELL

SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

Respectfully submitted,

Susan H. Smith
Recording Secretary