

**Town of Brookline  
Advisory Committee Minutes  
Tuesday, April 18, 2023**

**Meeting Recording:**

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**Present:** Ben Birnbaum, Harry Bohrs, Clifford Brown, Patricia Correa, John Doggett, Dennis Doughty, Katherine Florio, Harry Friedman, David-Marc Goldstein, Neil Gordon, Susan Granoff, Kelly Hardebeck, Amy Hummel, Anita Johnson, Alisa Jonas, Pamela Lodish, Joslin Murphy, Linda Olson Pehlke, Markus L. Penzel, David Pollak, Stephen Reeders, Lee Selwyn, Alok Somani, Carolyn R. Thall, Christine Westphal

**Absent:** Carol Levin, Janice Kahn, Carlos Ridruejo, Donelle O’Neal

**Also Attending:** Melissa Goff, Assistant Town Administrator for Finance Charles Young, Superintendent Dr. Linus Guillory, Finance and Administration Consultant Ruth Quinn Berdell, School Committee Chair David Pearlman, School Committee Vice Chair Andy Liu, School Committee members Mariah Nobrega, Valerie Frias, Susan Federspiel, Steve Ehrenberg, and Helen Charlupski; Mike Toffel, Carla Benka, Caroline Pierce, Justin Brown, Mark Gerber, Ryan Black, Jenny Lewis, Francis Shedd-Fisher, Michelle McGlone, Perry Grossman, Marissa Vogt, Bonnie Bastien, Natalia Linos, Kevin MacKenzie, Dave Gacioch, Wendy MacMillian, Savyon Cohen, Christina Saltman, Kimberly Loscalzo, Catherine Burke, Nate Tucker, and other members of the public.

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 PM.

**Announcements:** Pursuant to this Board’s Authority under 940 CMR 29.10 (8), all of the committee members will be participating remotely via telephone or video conferencing due to emergency regulations regarding the Corona virus. The Chairman has reviewed the requirements of the regulations. There is a quorum physically present and all votes taken will be recorded by roll call so all above listed Advisory Committee members will be allowed to vote.

The Chairman thanked Harry Friedman for chairing the committee the prior week

The chairman then reviewed where the AC was with the so-called "base budget":

- \* We added \$184,404 to the Police Department budget, restoring all "cuts" from the override budget. This mostly comprises two patrol officer positions.
- \* We added \$45,000 to the Fire Department budget, restoring all but \$5,000 of "cuts" from the override budget. This adds DEI training.
- \* We added \$468,839 to the DPW budget, restoring all “cuts” representing a number of items
- \* We added \$85,000 to ODICR for a language access coordinator
- \* We added \$25,000 to Veteran's Services for an internship program

\* We added \$203,889 to the Council on Aging, for cleaning services, the development of a strategic plan, transportation services, and other items.

\* In addition, we reduced the Non-Departmental Unclassified budget by \$92,895 with the understanding that the responsibility for Vocational Education (typically involving much less than that amount) would fall within the School Budget.

\* We did not approve the Planning Department budget of \$1,525,640

Not counting the Planning Department, which I'll get to in a second, that's \$1,012,132 of additions and \$92,895 of subtractions, which results in a net overage of \$919,237. In the event that the override fails, this imbalance in the base budget will have to be reconciled.

Many of us have bristled at suggestions that it is somehow improper for the Advisory Committee to make changes to departmental budgets. We point out, correctly, that the budget presented to Town Meeting is the Advisory Committee's budget. Left unsaid, but I would like to explicitly say, is the expectation that the Advisory Committee is expected to submit a serious, sensible, and defensible budget. We don't have that yet. As you all probably know, people across the Town are saying "the Advisory Committee is defunding the Planning Department" and then offering various explanations for this. I'm certainly not going to speak for everyone but I know that many of the "no" votes for the Planning Department's base and override budgets were protest votes intended to send a strong message of dissatisfaction with the Harvard Street plans and the failure to fund the Comprehensive Plan, rather than an explicit attempt to defund a department which we are required by bylaw to have. Obviously... we still need to vote them a budget (amount to be determined) and thus we will need to reconsider our vote between now and our omnibus budget vote? "What's that?", you say? "Omnibus budget vote"? That's right, that's where we get together and reconcile all of our individual departmental votes into a comprehensive budget which can be presented to Town Meeting. That's an easy vote if our expenditures line up with projected revenues; it's harder if we need to adjust expenditures or identify new revenues. Currently we are planning to hold our omnibus budget vote on May 4th. At that time, we will know the result of the override vote and therefore know which budget scenario we are fine tuning. Sometime between now and then we will reconsider the Planning Department. To repeat, during our omnibus vote we will be looking at all of the items we voted above, comparing them to each other and to the budgets of other departments so that we can make our final recommendation for Town Meeting.

Although the total dollar amount is atypical, I want to remind everyone present that THIS PROCESS IS PERFECTLY NORMAL. Exactly one year ago we had severe reservations about the building department budget. The subcommittee didn't recommend it and if I recall correctly the full Committee tabled the department's budget when it first came up. (As an aside, ideally yes, we probably would have been better served by tabling the planning department's budget this go-round when the vote came, that's on me.) But the end result of the debate over the building department's budget was that we ended up with a FY23 budget that our members could support AND a commitment for changes for this fiscal year, which I think we should all justifiably happy about. It is my hope and expectation that our reservations about the planning department will be similarly resolved.

And of course, we have the school budget to discuss tonight; more on that in a moment.

That's the base budget.

With respect to the override budget, our COA vote adds \$175,000 to the override budget. And our Unclassified (VoTech) subtraction of \$92,895 remains. So we are about \$82,000 out of whack there. (And of course, we may ultimately decide on a recommendation for the planning department which differs from its request.). Still, that discrepancy is well within the margins we routinely negotiate with the sixth floor on.

I hope that answers most of your questions about the budget process. If you have any additional ones, let's hold them for the end of the meeting where we do have a noticed item around the budget itself.

Regarding tonight's debate: We are discussing the FY24 Operating Budget for the Public Schools of Brookline. Here is a non-exhaustive (but exhausting!) list of things that are **NOT** on the agenda: the Pierce School project, the Driscoll School project, whether there will be funds available in the future for a Baker school project, the materials selected for the floors in any of those projects, whether it was reasonable to build a building over the T, whether classrooms needed the \$25,000 furniture allocation in the CIP, whether or not there are caches of furniture in various locations around town or whether that furniture could be repurposed, whether CIP funds should be spent on Newbury, whether capital funds should have been used for classroom space rental, what the contributing factors were in causing the BHS project to come in over budget, or whether the debt exclusion vote is a good idea. These are all topics that many of us have strong feelings about. They are also at best tangentially related to the question of the operating budget for FY24 for the PSB. Collectively we understand that there are many on this committee who view each of those questions as a perfect proxy for poor decision making resulting in overspending on the part of the Schools and so I ever-so-reluctantly concede that sometimes we will briefly touch on those items. But I want to be clear about this: if this debate tonight ever starts to go down the rabbit hole of re-litigating one of these items, I will be tempted to mute you and I cannot promise I will resist the temptation. This applies equally to members of the public during public comment, our invited guests, and members of the committee. I am confident we have a ton to discuss tonight: enrollment, class size, staffing levels, metrics of all sorts, student achievement, pedagogy, our shared values, and the like without the need to revisit this by-now well-trod ground that is not explicitly on the agenda.

Finally, I realize this has the potential to be the most heated discussion we have had thus far. Great. Oversight often requires blunt assessment. But that does entitle anyone to engage in ad hominem attacks or to impugn anyone's motives or integrity. (Or to commit the most unforgivable sin, which is to provide any spoilers about the Celtics game tonight.). Argue the results of decisions or the efficacy of recommendations all you want, but please do not resort to personal attacks. Everyone here is doing their best. Thank you!

**6:30 pm          Public Comment**

Natalia Linos, TMM Precinct 6, mom of 3 public school students, here to urge you to fully fund the budget. As many parents in Brookline, I moved here for the schools, the excellent reputation of the schools and for the future that could hold for my family. COVID was a wake-up call; it impacted parents like myself. It impacted teachers in ways that I think we are still going to have to understand. So, when we talk about numbers and classrooms in these quantitative ways, not really thinking about the real needs, the needs of our kids, the needs of our teachers, and are considering cuts at a time when we really should be focused on mental health and well-being of our schools, I urge you to reconsider. Brookline is a fantastic community. It's a community that brings together a really diverse group of people. It's a complicated community because of that. And our teachers are doing really difficult work. I have heard members of the AC talking about burnout in the Police Department and other departments. But the burnout the teachers face is some of the highest, and I include the public health professionals. I want to urge you to fully fund our schools to ensure that

whether or not the override passes, you do not cut these critical functions, and the reason why so many of us have chosen to make Brookline home. Thank you so much.

Kevin MacKenzie, Educator at the Lawrence School – Joining Natalia and urging you to fully fund the proposal from the School Department tonight. We have already seen what is going to be close to \$2M dollars in programmatic adjustments, or the more direct version of that is, cuts to our school staffing. I already have colleagues who have been notified that their position will no longer exist next year, and that is regardless of whether or not the override passes; it is regardless of whether or not the Advisory Committee makes any additional adjustments to the budget. I urge you to consider the impact this has on your school staff and students. Just three short years ago, 300 educators were laid off last minute. That was budget related, as well. I am hoping that we do not repeat the mistakes of the past. I believe that this committee will do all that they can with the resources they have. I urge you to fund the budget that they have requested. Thank you.

Dave Gacioch, Resident Precinct 14 – Over the last several years I have gotten to know enrollment patterns, having worked on them over the years. PSB is not at a low ebb in enrollment. People need to remember that kids and teachers aren't widgets to move around to get right ratios. Class sizes will fluctuate. Efficiently run school system already. Perception that PSB glibly overspends and it isn't true. Fairly conservative compared to neighboring districts. Urge AC appropriately fund the School budget.

Kim Loscalzo TMM Precinct 10, Driscoll School PTO Co-chair, and mom of two Brookline schoolchildren. Echo what Dave, Kevin and Natalia have said. It's essential to fully fund Brookline schools. These are our kids. These are our friends. These are our teachers. These are our staff. It's not just numbers shifting around on paper. They need to be fully funded. Thank you.

**6:45 pm Report from the Schools Subcommittee, Discussion and Possible Vote on FY24 School Department Operating Budget**

Cliff Brown, Chair of the Schools Subcommittee explained that the committee did something different this year – they met on a regular basis. They sat in on School Committee Finance meetings and held at least 3 meetings to discuss the budget. Cliff thanked everyone on the committee for participating to that degree and feels it was significantly beneficial and will be demonstrated in the final report and analysis, linked to these minutes.

He offered thanks to Katherine Florio and others for assistance with the write up and to School Superintendent Dr. Guillory and School Committee Member Mariah Nobrega for the time they spent with the subcommittee.

He then outlined the agenda for the first item: Dr. Guillory will give a presentation and then Cliff will highlight key questions and answers that were discussed and clarified during the hearing process (refer to the subcommittee's linked report below). Other subcommittee members will add commentary of their own to address other specific issues that were discussed.

For FY24, The Public Schools of Brookline have been allocated \$127.0 million for operations via the Town-School Partnership (TSP). Currently, the PSB projected budget is about \$130.0 million, leaving a gap of slightly more than \$3.0 million the PSB would need to address if the proposed override does not pass. PSB is seeking a first-year operating override of \$3,701,871 to fund that gap and to also provide \$690,000 to fund five (5) new initiatives. The three-year total override request from the PSB is \$6,988,367. This total reflects \$6,101,927 for operations<sup>1</sup> and \$886,440 for the aforementioned initiatives.

The Subcommittee unanimously approved the PSB's 'No Override' budget (5-0 vote). The PSB's 'Override' budget request was approved by a vote of 3 in favor (Birnbaum, Brown, Thall) and 2 opposed (Florio, Reeders).

Next, Dr. Guillory shared a presentation with the Advisory Committee which is linked at the end of these minutes.

The presentation covered superintendency and district evaluation, budget background, programmatic adjustments and failed override impacts (All information also posted on [www.brookline.k12.ma.us/budget](http://www.brookline.k12.ma.us/budget))

One theme emerged: Decision-making using data and information. He addressed both what has been done and what remains to be done.

He noted that there have been 20 superintendents in 150 years, seven superintendents in the last eight years in Brookline alone indicating a great deal of turnover. How do we stabilize our organization while still providing an excellent educational experience?

- **Ensuring Academic Rigor:** Initiated external evaluations for program review (intent to cycle through all programs on a ~10 year basis; Completed to date: English Language Education, Child Study Team/Response to Intervention, Middle School Scheduling; Stakeholder involvement of caregivers and staff (In process: World Language, Social Studies, Health/Sex Education, Full schedule in development, Review "commendations" and "recommendations" used to improve instruction; Curriculum overviews Summer 2022 - ensure common understanding [www.brookline.k12.ma.us/domain/58](http://www.brookline.k12.ma.us/domain/58), Next step: update curriculum to align with the MA Frameworks and other National Standards, formalize cross-curricular learning, e.g. project-based; Refocused on differentiated and inclusive Tier 1 instruction, requires investment in professional development, academic intervention; savings realized on more costly Tier 2 and 3 interventions
- **External Evaluation** (refer to Slide 8)
- **Socioemotional learning and mental health:** Research shows socioemotional learning improves academic performance by 11-17% ("School belonging" and "supportive relationships at school" are among the two- the strongest predictors of academic performance; Universal Screener Survey initiated in SY20-21 (Recent data (March 30th presentation) show improved SEL data (compared to SY20-21), discrepancies across subpopulations, certain programs (e.g. Steps to Success) provide protective factors; School teams use these data (and other sources of information) to identify targets of whole-class SEL instruction and identify students who need add'l support
- **Equitable access for all students:** Unacceptable disparate outcomes for multiple populations, e.g. students with disabilities, Black/brown students, low-income students ("opportunity gap"); Need: Get actionable data on student challenges (New: mClass literacy screener for K-2 → early identification of language-based learning disabilities, track individual student progress, timely intervention; Need data sources beyond mClass (e.g. math and intermediate reading); Invest in programs (e.g. Steps to Success) that improve SEL → academic performance (see prior slide) - disinvest in programs that don't meet our needs; External evaluation of special education program identified opportunities for improvement that are being deployed
- **Budget/capital planning & sustainability:** Emphasis on delivering timely, accurate information, compliance; Reporting (budget book delivered in January 2022, 2023 with iterative improvements, e.g. inclusion of detailed PSB Capital Improvements Plan and quarterly financial reports delivered, iterating toward standardized format); Advancing compliance with budget process engaging School Site Councils (state requirement), budget aligned with state requirements, clean audit of DESE end-of-year report, SC warrant signing; New deputy for A&F Dr.

Susan Givens has been hired; Multi-year plan to return most of BEEP to elementary school buildings; Defining and managing deferred maintenance

- **Personnel development:** Providing both professional development and evaluation: Ensuring regular staff evaluations/feedback at every level of the organization, Superintendent visits average of 2 schools/week (“Management By Walking Around”), providing principal feedback, Recognition - “Spotlight on Excellence”, Diversifying the PSB workforce: supporting SEL “sense of belonging” and “trusted adult”
- **Going towards a school system:** Unifying practices across schools, improving use of student level data across schools to inform instruction, aligning common, district determined assessments across schools.

The decision criteria for reductions is a process informed by School Committee budget guidelines, bound by federal/state mandates, focused on minimizing impact to students. Reductions focused on staff primarily because PSB budget is 87% personnel; the remaining 13% is largely fixed costs. It is important to recognize staff has already been reduced significantly from pre-pandemic; PSB is at 92% of pre-pandemic staff for 91% of pre-pandemic students and making further cuts requires changes to programs that PSB offers students.

\$1.85M Programmatic Adjustments in FY24 (happening regardless of override outcome)

1. Approximately 10 K-8 sections to be reduced (from 251 total to 241)
  - Equivalent to 13.0 FTE reduction (e.g., 10.0 FTE classroom teacher positions plus 3.0 FTE specialist positions, e.g. art)
2. Elimination of 7.3 FTE math and literacy coaches
  - Remaining coaches will support K-5 instruction
3. Year 3 will require an additional \$1M to be cut (not being outlined at this time)

He further reviewed the impact of a failed override (see slides 25-27) and noted that with override funding, PSB can continue to serve all students at high levels with outstanding academic programs and robust student service/support programs; maintain, attract and retain a highly-skilled workforce; new initiatives (e.g. World Language redesign, SoBro fee-free bus) will be funded; programmatic adjustments will still be necessary but will be manageable.

Cliff Brown offered how the budget had been reviewed historically – heavy on data - but what he hopes to do is simply share and address questions raised during the course of their deliberations with the Superintendent and School Committee.

The first thing the subcommittee asked concerned the notion of every child achieving, and every child being invested in learning. What does that mean? The answer we got back which may or may not be satisfactory to some was every child achieving is supposed to reflect the fact that every child is different and at various points in time every child has different needs or different issues, and the things they may need to be focused on in achieving at a specific point in time can vary. The example given was a child is able to read but can they comprehend what their reading? So, reading comprehension becomes a new focus, a specific intervention.

The next question was how do you know we are one of the best performing school districts in the State? What is it that you are able to point to as proof? What are the metrics that you use? They were honest that didn't really have any. They're expecting to be able to come up with set of metrics that they will be able to apply that will go beyond the MCATs and be able to answer the question for the entire community. Cliff acknowledged the turnover in a short space of time and the leadership vacuum.

Regarding the achievement gap that was raised by Dr. Guillory and others, there have been a few different outside studies that have been done over the last year, presentations and recordings, and common themes emerged and run through them. This is very important to the School Committee and based on his presentation, to Dr. Guillory also, but there are a variety of challenges that are systemic in our school system, within the entire organization, that are going to take time to for us turn around and achieve the balance or the elimination of the opportunity gap that everyone recognizes.

Cliff briefly touched on the 5 specific initiatives that the School Department is looking to take on if the override passes, Full Day BEEP, Athletics Support, Student Services Support, South Brookline No-Fee Bus and K-12 World Language Program Redesign (see the subcommittee report for additional details).

Subcommittee members shared additional comments about issues that had been raised during the course of the department's budget review and are summarized below.

**Stephen Reeders** – Complimented Dr. Guillory on his excellent presentation. Issue we face is as a Town we've got a significant number of dollars going to the schools when other departments are tight on budget and making unacceptable compromises (would like to see prioritization of those compromises). If you could only make do with X amount of funding, what would you do? Honest discussion of how we can compromise. He cited Veteran's Services using a personal vehicle for taking constituents to appointments because there is no funding for alternative transportation. Also, would like to see metrics and address the achievement gap – can't waste the skills. Prioritization especially around the achievement gap, and developing and reporting measurements would make people feel better about progress being made.

**Katherine Florio** – Thanked Dr. Guillory, Cliff, members of the School Committee present, and who have attended School Subcommittee meetings. Acknowledged that there were some very good discussions and all have worked hard to get where we are. She highlighted some specific problems with the report.

The School Subcommittee had questions but hasn't gotten good answers. Most concerning is that any attempt to have this conversation suggests to some that those asking questions intend to do harm to public school education in Brookline. The Schools would be better off for conversations like one we're having tonight, rather than attacking the people who are asking questions.

Regarding the School budget, there was talk about the use of one-time funds for ongoing operating concerns. The public schools have funded excess capacity for four years, and have used one-time funds and funds with an end date and are now requesting that the Town or someone make up for this funding shortfall. The expectation was that Town revenues would return but they haven't returned, and there was no Plan B.

Also concerning is this budget request includes contractual obligations. Teacher's salaries are negotiated with a union. But contracts were signed and committed to before the Town had the money to pay them. There are pressures and people need to be paid, but, concerning that the School Committee would be willing to put the Town into that position.

She noted that the School Committee accepts grants. A wonderful opportunity to experiment with new programming, to get materials that the Schools don't have the budget for. However, once the Grant funding is up, the Schools request the Town to pick up the costs of that service. Perhaps it is a good service, and perhaps it is something that we ought to add to the school curriculum but to automatically expect that it will be picked up is concerning.

Additionally, we have no way of tracking how many of these grants are outstanding. The subcommittee asked for this information at least twice, and it hasn't been provided. Yet the Town will be asked to pick up the funding for services or positions that have been provided previously by grants.

The Town ought to be provided with that information in advance, so that we can discuss and plan for it and I'd like that to be something that happens going forward.

The World Language program sounds like a wonderful program and Dr. Guillory's vision for what's possible here in Brookline with a strong language program. But \$115,000 for a position to redesign the program, to reevaluate the program, a program that's been in existence since 2007, and has survived without being reevaluated that long - is this position absolutely crucial this year?

Regarding BEEP fully and completely support affordable daytime child care and daytime programming. That this is excellent programming, and highly sought after by residents in the Town. It's exciting that BEEP can be charging market rates. It's exciting that they expect to be able to fill the program to capacity. And yet, we've heard for the last year about how complex the Brookline Public School system is, how stretched the administration is, how difficult the problems are, and how much need there is for more administrative support. So, it's hard to believe that if that's accurate on one hand, then it's also reasonable, on the other hand, that this is the correct time to start a new service. What is it going to take to deliver a successful program, and especially since the promise of this program is that it will pay for itself. Will this take administrative staff's attention away from academics? This hasn't been addressed.

Finally, she reiterated concerns about lack of metrics and unanswered questions.

**Carolyn Thall** – Thanked Dr. Guillory for his thorough presentation. Agreed it's unfortunate these conversations have had a combative tenor and that the flow of information, and responses to questions the subcommittee asked were either slow in coming or never came at all making it difficult to do the job the subcommittee is charged with. No hard data for some statements. Also discussed BEEP and reiterated some points made by Cliff.

**Ben Birnbaum** – Seven School superintendents in eight years is an important matter, and it underlies something of what we're all experiencing. The superintendency of Brookline schools turned into a game of musical chairs for a period of time.

When a corporation and someone referred to the School Department as a corporation, when a corporation has seven visions, seven strategic directions, and at this point six leadership, abandonments, failings or departures, over the course of a decade, that corporation is lucky to stay afloat, much less prosper. Yet, Brookline has done well in those ten years which has to be a tribute to the people who do the work. Not suggesting superintendents don't do work but also parents of children, teachers, and even particular members of the School Board on occasion, but the commitment to parents most of all is what marks Brookline. The key now is how we go on and maintain our rather eminent standing and the patience and generosity of taxpayers which right at this moment is being tested.

Additional comments addressed transparency, open forums for discussing the strategic plan and making people feel part of the plan; update the School website to improve transparency and accessibility of data. Also, the need to "maintain peace in the house" and not pit one department against another. We are a community. We've got to align ourselves with a plan that carries us for a good distance. We haven't had one that does so purposefully, openly, with clear understanding of goals and of their costs and is not an annual scramble for resources.



Addressing the Town with what the intent of this strategic plan is, how it's going to work, who's been hired, and why that person has been hired would be a great step toward transparency. A strategic plan is terribly important, it leads to an operational plan, one that serves the needs of people.

### **School Committee Comments and Questions**

Mariah Nobrega – Grateful for comments everyone has made; strategy, metrics, data, transparency, are all critical – based on what you heard tonight, Brookline Public Schools and Dr. Guillory are actively working on advancing this in our schools. In spite of COVID, in spite of the leadership turnover, he and his team are making notable improvements that you saw tonight in the slides. PSB has reduced staffing accordingly and proportionately with student enrollment. then his main edition has made additional cuts this year of an additional almost \$2M as shown on the slides, as have the consequences of cutting further. The compromises that Stephen referred to have already been taken in the programmatic adjustments. We're at the point of terrible decisions if an override fails. It comes down to whether you want to see the budget cut further, or whether, as Steven himself said, you believe in keeping good teachers in front of students. I'd ask for Advisory support of the schools.

David Pearlman agreed with Mariah's comments. Regarding the compromise, we actually took it upon ourselves to make reductions. We were looking hard for where we can make efficiencies. We feel that we identified some, and we're committed to making those irrespective of what occurs with the override. We hope that the override will pass for very obvious reasons among them being the 43 FTEs. That's very real. It's true that there are different ways how we could arrive to that 43 FTE figure but we really would have to make cuts on that scale. Just to help visualize how big that is, some of our K-8 schools have fewer than 43 FTEs. So essentially, we'll be talking about cutting more than an entire K-8 school worth of staff.

This is a very difficult predicament that we're in. We don't take lightly the monies that we receive for our budget which is why we made that \$1.85M in cuts prior to any of these pressures. We're committed to working with all of you. We agree that transparency is important. Speaking for myself and I'm sure many others, it can be difficult to answer questions, and as rapidly as many of you would like. But it doesn't mean we're not trying to do it. We do try to get access to the information.

We recognize that we can always improve how we organize our website, for instance, as well as how we identify specific metrics for evaluating programs. I would say, though, that the program reviews that we've already undertaken, those did include quite a few metrics in in those findings, and some of them were quantitative. So, we're also qualitative. It was a mixture, and the next step, once we have all this data is to look at the ways that we're going to be evaluating in the future, so that we can develop those methodologies in transparent fashion, and share them with all of you in the broader community. I'm very much in agreement with a lot that I'm hearing, and I think that we can have a very collaborative partnership moving forward. But the reality from where we stand right now on this day is that we really do need our full budget to be funded, for the cuts would be quite dramatic.

The Chair of Schools Subcommittee Cliff Brown explained the recommendation being made by the Subcommittee:

The subcommittee took two votes. The first was on the no override request of \$127,002,815. That motion was seconded and approved by a vote of 5 to 0. That would be the first motion.

The second motion would be for the override budget of 130,704,685 which was moved and seconded at our meeting and passed by a vote of 3 in favor and 2 opposed...

## Comments, Questions, Discussion

Susan Granoff Comment: Decisions about the education of our children seems to be made in a vacuum, decisions about what to spend and how to spend, and what makes the most sense. But you're doing it without considering the impact of those decisions on the rest of the Town's ability to fund the other parts of the Town and children's lives are being impacted by these decisions, so that the students' capacity to learn is being impacted.

For example, if they have to walk it on rat-infested streets, because the Health Department wasn't given sufficient funding during COVID years to both deal with COVID, and to maintain the level of rodent control that had been done in the past.

The libraries are being impacted because they don't have sufficient funds for providing certain services that would be a benefit to students. We have streets in need of repair. Students who have grandparents in this community suffering from the trauma of COVID years, according to the Director of the Council on Aging, and there isn't sufficient funding to hire geriatric social workers to help them. These all affect the Town, but also the students, and I think that we are all in this together. There seems to be a very narrow focus where the sole considerations are whether the pedagogy is correct, and we're using the best educational methods without thinking.

Well, if we're spending this money for that, it may mean this will have an impact, a huge impact on the rest of our students' lives. I would hope in the future that that gets factored in somehow, so that there isn't a sense of isolated decision making that's going on.

The other question is, I noticed that you were talking about, and I was very appreciative of the fact that you really feel how important it is for students to feel as though they belong to that. They're part of an educational community, and that everyone is valuable. I wonder how it was possible that the High School graduation last June was scheduled on an important Jewish holiday, and it meant that Orthodox Jewish students couldn't attend their own graduation.

I know that decision making is made about things like what is the best day for graduation, but it did send a message that to the orthodox Jewish community that maybe they aren't quite part of the community, and I know that was totally unintentional. It just seems as though that was a poor decision-making process. How is that decision made? The decision impacted my granddaughter, who was not able to attend her own graduation, and nor would her grandfather, who is in Newton, have been able to attend, even if she could have. Nor would her siblings have been able to attend, because they are also orthodox, and they don't live in Brookline. It seems as though this is just one person, but I'm sure there are other Orthodox Jewish children who are graduating, and somehow that wasn't considered as important, or at least that was the message that was conveyed by that so hopefully in the future that gets factored into it as well. The point you made about how you want every student to feel that they are part of a community is an important one, because I don't think students live in or learn in a vacuum. I think that's an important part of the whole educational process. Thank you.

Lee Selwyn Q: You have said you have as an objective moving the BEEP classes from rental space into school buildings. Have you actually done a financial analysis to see whether it makes sense to do that? A: Dr. Guillory responded the first part of that is essentially done - the movement from the Clark Road lease, and we are actually assessing what the impact would be for the other two leases that we have in place, which would be the Putterham lease, and the and the one down over on Beacon. We are looking at the cost-benefit ratio of that.

Q: Where are those functions going to go in within your buildings? A: We're looking at the utilization. We are looking at the utilization of the Beacon location, we're looking at FRR as well as Lawrence school, because we know that that's

important for our North Brookline families to have a walking distance, and then for our Clark Road allocation, we're looking at the utilization of Driscoll for those for those spaces, and we have another year to reassign the other two.

There were additional questions about leases and cost of leases, in the CIP and operating budget.

Comment: Consider optics of School Department mailing via express mail to the Advisory Committee spending \$1,000, when the Fire Department was denied in the base budget \$2,000 for toilet paper. So the Fire Department is being asked to do without toilet paper, and the School Department goes and spends \$1,000 to send documents that could have been delivered by email (NOTE: Advisory Committee members specifically requested the documents be snail mailed).

Q: When COVID struck you lost 700-800 students almost immediately. Has the School Department has ever done any research as to as to where those kids went? Did people move out of Brookline? Get homeschooled? Go to private schools? A: You may recall, or you may be aware that Brookline is a large international population. So when the when COVID struck and borders were closed, families had to make decisions about whether they were going to stay in the States or go back to their home country. So there were quite a few international students that did leave the United States, there were students that just left Massachusetts. And then there were also families that chose to home school their children because of the uncertainty as to whether or not school was going to be open the following year. Quite a bit of movement across that, and I think we saw that across Massachusetts to the tune of about 30-45,000 students

Q: Do you know the exact breakdown, how many in each category? A: I've been told, and know anecdotally what they are. But we can't run the report to see where those numbers actually break out. That's information that I have, and can provide it to you.

Comment: Want to point out that this document did come out January 17, and that none of us on the Schools Subcommittee received, it wasn't just the Advisory Committee that didn't get a copy.

Alisa Jonas – Questions and Comments: Teacher evaluations and student performance concerns. How will we be evaluating teachers? How are we evaluating students – determined we have an achievement gap by looking at MCAS? MCAS was established because there were not standards in the State to evaluate student performance. Tools within MCAS that we could be using to look at how individual students are doing, how classes are doing, looking at specific subjects which particular types of weaknesses and strengths we have in each of the subject areas. Not just a high school graduation tool. You show that the sense of belonging by students has gone up. It would be interesting to see on the MCAS, has that actually been reflected in improving performance? Are we using the MCAS as a tool? A: For the teacher evaluation system we actually collect our data in a system called [TeachPoint](#). Principals evaluate teachers and new teachers or nonprofessional status. Teachers have a more rigorous and more frequent observation pattern than our professional status teachers, according to the State guidelines. But Brookline does have an extensive 42-page evaluation agreement with the Teachers Union around the evaluation, so I can certainly make that document available for those that are interested. As far as MCAS is concerned, we do have those metrics broken down, and I believe we did a presentation to School Committee earlier in the year with that, and we can also make that information available for folks to review. But we actually did go and break down the various successes, as well as the challenges that we're also experiencing. I tend to think of MCAS as an autopsy report. It's sort of after the fact, after everything has been done. So when we think about assessment, we're thinking about ongoing a real time.

Don't understand budget increases each year given 10% drop in enrolments. Can you clarify that further?

Comment following up on what Susan and Lee have touched on, which is why the Advisory Committee has been concerned about the School budget versus “the Town budget.” The problem is, I think, that we have a bunch of departments in this town, and Schools is just one department. Information on the TMMA as the Advisory Committee wanting to take money from the School and give it to other departments was not correct. Other departments are level funded or have experienced cuts, and have to compete with each other for funding. The Advisory Committee has been hearing from all of them and responding to their concerns as well. The School department which is just one of many departments, though by far the largest, can make its own decisions and sees itself as providing an important role, which, of course they are. But there are other departments that also provide needed services, such as Fire, Council on Aging, Health Department, etc. The schools are not the only ones, and I think that balance has to be addressed and looked at. That is why the Advisory Committee has been taking the votes they have been at this time.

Regarding the question, why costs were going up, if enrollments were going down Dr. Guillory started it off, and then asked Mariah to weigh in as our Finance Subcommittee Chair. One thing to keep in mind is that the School Department has adjusted its staffing to mirror that of pre-pandemic, or our pandemic enrollment, so there have been adjustments made in that regard. I think it's also important to note that a number of one-time costs that were also utilized as what I called financial band aids to offset our operating costs, as well. So now that those one-time funds are going away we're realizing that now on the operating side. The question is, and this is the conversation that the School Committee has had, is we're providing levels of service that we need, and if we take away those services, then we are diminishing the experiences of the services to our students. And so that's not something that folks are willing to or take on. We made some adjustments, and we'll continue doing so.

Mariah Nobrega: I want to emphasize what Dr. Guillory just said, staffing has been reduced. We have also eliminated certain programs. The only thing that we have added was school adjustment counselors in response to the mental health crisis, and that was just the FTEs. I want to highlight that we are much below in terms of the FTE count by about 130, which is drastically lower than before the pandemic, and the reality is that costs rise, even as you may be cutting the number of staff, the other costs rise. There are certainly other costs embedded that are not within our control. For example, out of district tuition is something that we do not control. It's not necessarily a fixed cost, but the tuition is set by the State, and cost increases are set by the State. There are many different complex things that are happening in the budget relating to all of this. But at the end of the day the budget has been managed to minimize the increases year on year, and we have also, as the Town did, dealt with level funding over several of these years. It was not just the Town that had level funding. PSB also had level funding.

Pam Lodish: Commend Katharine and Stephen for trying to questions answers. Suggest we write questions down and put them forward before next year's budget discussion. Financial predicament every year so have a plan to address them in advance instead at the end of the year. Schools are terribly important but there are equally important services. We need to work together and earlier to come to agreements.

Dr. Guillory agreed about asking questions in a uniformed format, early in the process and providing answers promptly. Get questions in advance and have them agreed upon and avoid peppering.

Amy Hummel: Asks that questions be fully responsive, not just refer to this page or look at this chart. Have them be informational.

Alok Somani: Thank you to the Superintendent and the subcommittee for this work. Have you considered an activities-based budget (versus line item)? And maybe talk about the priorities that the School has versus the amount of money

we have available. Has this been done and whether there's been discussion, the priorities of activities. A: I'm familiar with activity-based budgeting. I'm not sure how we would necessarily apply it in that context, and we don't need to necessarily discuss it now the School Committee has issued a list of guidelines that derive how we want to direct Dr. Guillory to invest the funds, and you also saw that there are also Federal and State mandates that we must comply with so budgeting and a public education context has other components to it. Happy to discuss the concepts you're talking about Alok separately.

Katherine Florio: Clarified that she was speaking earlier about a printed copy of the School Budget. Those of us on the School Subcommittee work with the school budget over the course of several months, and we spend several hours on it a week. I at least prefer to do that kind of work on paper. Secondly, Pam's suggestion of Advisory sending the School Committee a list of questions was an excellent one. I know that we on the Subcommittee do that. If you look at the back of the report, you'll see the list of questions that we formally asked the School Committee, and you can read the answers. Cliff collects our questions and forwards them all to Dr. Guillory.

We do attend School Finance committee meetings, and that School committee members attend subcommittee meetings, and there are questions that are asked under those circumstances, but I believe that we do follow them up in lists through Cliff.

A **MOTION** was made and seconded for Favorable Action on the School Department FY24 base operating budget for PSB of \$127,092,815. By a **VOTE** of 21 in favor, 1 opposed, and 2 abstentions, the Advisory Committee recommends Favorable Action.

A **MOTION** was made and seconded for Favorable Action on FY24 'override' operating budget for PSB of \$130,704,685. By a **VOTE** of 11 in favor, 6 opposed, and 7 abstentions, the Advisory Committee recommends Favorable Action on FY24 'override' operating budget for PSB of \$130,704,685.

#### **8:00 PM          Review, Discussion and Possible Votes on WA 7 – FY24 Budget, including Conditions of Appropriations**

A **MOTION** was made and seconded to TABLE discussion of WA 7. By a VOTE of 24 in favor, none opposed and no abstentions, discussion was tabled.

#### **8:45 PM          Other business**

Upon a **MOTION** made and seconded to adjourn, and voted unanimously, the meeting was adjourned at 9:55 p.m.

**Documents Presented** <https://www.brooklinema.gov/DocumentCenter/Index/4071>

- 4.10.23\_SC\_Presentation\_Fy2024 Budget Adjustments and Planning
- 2023 04 18 Advisory Committee Meeting Agenda Updated
- Links to Documents Referenced in Report
- March 8 Presentation To Subcommittee 1
- PSB Enrollment Update\_4.10.231
- Public Comment FY24 School Dept Budget
- Schools Subcommittee Write-Up Spring 2023
- Additional Public Comment FY 24 School Dept Budget
- 4.18.23\_AC\_full\_Presentation from School Superintendent

VOTES

	Vote 1	Vote 2	Vote 3
# Votes Yes	21	11	24
# Votes No	1	6	0
# Votes Abstain	2	7	0
Vote Description:	MAIN MOTION: FAVORABLE ACTION on FY24 'base' operating budget for PSB of \$127,092,815	MAIN MOTION: FAVORABLE ACTION on FY24 'override' operating budget for PSB of \$130,704,685	MAIN MOTION: TABLE DISCUSSION of WA7
	<i>Enter Y, N or A</i>	<i>Enter Y, N or A</i>	<i>Enter Y, N or A</i>
Ben Birnbaum	Y	Y	Y
Harry Bohrs	Y	Y	Y
Cliff Brown	Y	Y	Y
Patty Correa	Y	Y	Y
John Doggett	Y	Y	Y
Katherine Florio	Y	A	Y
Harry Friedman	A	N	Y
David-Marc Goldstein	Y	N	Y
Neil Gordon	Y	Y	Y
Susan Granoff	Y	A	Y
Kelly Hardebeck	Y	Y	Y
Amy Hummel	Y	A	Y
Anita Johnson	Y	A	Y
Alisa Jonas	Y	A	Y
Janice Kahn			
Pam Lodish	Y	A	Y
Joslin Murphy	Y	N	Y
Donelle O'Neal, Sr.			
Linda Olson Pehlke	A	A	Y
Markus Penzel	Y	Y	Y
David Pollak	Y	Y	Y
Stephen Reeders	Y	N	Y
Carlos Ridruejo			
Lee Selwyn	N	N	Y
Alok Somani	Y	N	Y
Carolyn Thall	Y	Y	Y
Christine Westphal	Y	Y	Y
Dennis Doughty			