

Tamworth School Board Public Forum January 25, 2010

Present were Board Members Laura Pike, Brenda Robinson, Dan Rowe, John Cleveland, Superintendent Jay McIntire, Principal Noel DeSousa, and Secretary Kathi Brown.

Board Chair Laura Pike called the meeting to order at 6:05pm. Everyone at the front table introduced themselves and she appreciates the extra effort by the custodians in setting up for the event. There will be no formal agenda, open discussions and please be respectful to everyone's opinions. We will start with a presentation, information behind the recommendations on the budget, then go into open discussions, which will be facilitated. The objective tonight is to provide information about the changes under consideration for the budget.

Noel DeSousa gave a presentation on re-organizing for instruction 2010-2011 and beyond. This is the second year of proposing incremental changes in the budget. It was reviewed what was reduced in last year's budget. There are 3 main categories in the budget, Personnel Expenses, Fixed Obligations, and Books, Supplies & Materials and fees. Personnel is the line where significant budget impacts can be made.

Comments below:

Jenn Mashiak - Asked why, when comparing five schools, you picked these schools. Ashland seems comparable to ours but not the others. Noel DeSousa thinks that Ashland is most comparable in population. The schools had to be able to be reached in a nearby geographic area and not that many K-8 schools are around. She also asked about the comparison of federal funds for the different schools.

Peg Delong - Asked about the staffing chart, minimum requirements. Is this a state law? Are we not complying in health education now? Noel DeSousa stated that the requirements keep getting revised, health needed to be taught prior, but not by a specific teacher. Now a new requirement is a health teacher.

Peg Delong - Regarding HQT, if you are moving staff around to other positions, would we still be meeting the standards. HQT & certified are related. Noel DeSousa stated that staff would need to be qualified to teach other classes.

Susan Dirubbo - When comparing different schools were any middle school programs compared with Kennett & Bartlett, who are local, to see what is offered there. Noel DeSousa said that no they were not.

Susan Dirubbo - Why should we send our kids to a minimum standards school, instead of top standards?

Lori Palmer - How will these proposed changes affect the students and the bottom line? For music, it will change the program, frees a day for each band and chorus. Physical education classes would reduce time spent in class, and the art program would

be reduced by at least 25%. Noel DeSousa referred people to look at the back page of the handout given out. The number of minutes for specialist's subjects will drop. Elimination of the TAG and Alternative Education programs, will impact the higher and lower level students. How many students will be affected by the program cuts and how much would be saved on our taxes, does it make an impact. TAG is 34 students. Alternative education is about 15 students. Jay McIntire stated that they are creating programs for students within the capacity of the town. All day Kindergarten meets all students' needs. There is no right or correct budget. They only compared schools that were being successful. Alternative education is \$74,095.00 per year. TAG is \$68,732.00 per year. All Day Kindergarten is \$59,694.00. Board decisions are based on the student's best interests. \$202,000.00 is the difference between proposal A and proposal B.

John Cleveland - On total cost, all demographic data shows a declining enrollment, a steady curve. Look at table 1 and table 2 in the handout

Thomas Chant - Asked if Jay McIntire attended Kindergarten for a full day or a half day. Jay McIntire stated that he was in full day kindergarten. Thomas Chant would not have wanted to go to a full day kindergarten.

Jenn Mashiak - Wanted clarification as to if the Superintendent will get a 6% raise and an additional \$10,000.00 if he can reduce the budget each year, along with the criteria involved and how many schools are participating. It was stated that there is no bonus based on budget performance (reduction). All raises for the Superintendent must come from all three schools in the district. Dan Rowe stated that this statement, regarding a raise and a bonus is absolutely not true.

Ellen Farnum - She supports full day kindergarten, it benefits families and kids who have no one to come home to. She asked that the Alternative Education program be explained. Noel DeSousa stated that it is typically older students in 7 & 8th grade, when a student does not function well in a regular classroom. It is done in a variety of subject areas, along with parent's approval, only one or two classes usually. Some are special education students, probably about 1/2. Alternative education parallels what is going on in the regular classroom. Ellen Farnum asked if students would be set up for non success, if put in a regular classroom. Noel DeSousa said there are no easy decisions to make when cutting the budget and programs, we have to fold these students back into the regular education programs.

Peg Custer - TAG program. She is concerned that it is being eliminated, will the students affected be helped when being put back into a regular program. Jay McIntire stated that regarding the TAG program, it is currently only English & Language Arts instruction they are getting. These students and others are also talented in other areas, but currently we are serving a very large proportion of students in one content area. In the future a program that addresses all content area and grades would be beneficial.

Gail Marrone - Regarding the art & media cuts, what is the cost savings. Jay McIntire replied that Art would be a \$52,000. savings.

Sarah Wright - Is there a disservice to the content of the TAG program as it exists now? Jay McIntire said yes there is if the program only serves language arts and serves 20% of the students. The program should cross all subject areas and grade levels. Sarah Wright wants to keep the program, so you should alter it and change it to fit all needs and then the town would be in favor of it. Do this now instead of bringing it back in the future.

Belle Stafford - She views this as a process the board has to go through. She implores the school board to not make these changes, as drastic cuts were made last year, and we will be hiring a new principal. We need to wait and watch what happens. The town will understand this if it is explained to them.

Lori Palmer - Other schools do not have these positions that we do. It is wonderful that Tamworth has these programs. The town needs to utilize the programs we have and advertise our school and programs. These programs will help make our school more available to families who want to move in.

Margaret Rieser - Asked about the behavioral specialist program as other schools do not have this. Explain what it is please. Noel DeSousa stated that we have a higher poverty level, and this program is needed due to our school populations and students with intense behavior needs. This is not an Assistant Principal position. Our Behavior Specialist teacher is certified in emotional handicaps. Some students have undiagnosed handicaps and need to be removed from classes for behavioral issues. The specialist does observations of students in classes and then develops their plans. There are roughly 16 to 20 students he deals with now. He is a Special ed teacher with a clinical background. Jay McIntire says it is a professional disciplinarian position with positive behavioral intervention, giving students skills they need using a positive behavior approach.

Matt Schartner - How do other schools deal with the problem of not having a behavior specialist on the staff. Jay McIntire stated that usually the special education teacher has kids in a regular program, which makes it harder for students to focus in a classroom. Students don't get support unless they have a recorded disability. Other schools do without it, it is up to the town to decide.

Sarah Wright - How do you justify keeping the behavior specialist position when you are cutting the TAG program. How do you rationalize this? Jay McIntire stated that the budget is the board's budget, not his. Difficult choices have to be made in budgeting. This is only the proposed budget, this forum is to get opinions from the townspeople. All day kindergarten is a recommendation that came from Jay McIntire.

Megan Feddern - Asked if the board had looked into future success of TAG kids at Kennett or the Alternative Education kids at Kennett. Laura Pike stated that they had not looked into this so there is no comparative analysis.

Liza Townsend - You need to look at the future of these kids. The TAG program has benefited them. Students will be getting the low end of the deal if this program is cut.

Paul King - Wanted to know how many of the other five schools looked at have all day Kindergarten. Noel DeSousa stated that one did.

Jenn Mashiak - Asked if Jay McIntire has another budget, that is not available to the public and what would he do different than the board to save our wonderful school. Jay McIntire stated that he does not have another budget, he develops a budget for the board as he is an employee of the board. He assists the board. Early childhood education is important to him and it is the key to long term academic success. It costs more for all day kindergarten, but the country has gone from 10% to 60% over 40 years in implementing this program. One to one computing has been discussed for students at the higher grades. The School Board authorized a study of the building with outside engineers to go over the building, for a preventative maintenance schedule and costing. This is an effort to use the public's money wisely. SAU offices are looking for alternative space, including K A Brett School area. Why spend more money than you have to, you should put money where the kids are.

Kate Thompson - She liked what Belle Stafford said earlier. You need to care about kid's education and taxes. She would like to hear from teachers here tonight on the proposed cuts and changes. Questions full day Kindergarten as kids need lots of free time to play and be outside. Is all day Kindergarten going to be academically focused. Jay McIntire stated that all day Kindergarten being academically focused is not true. Half day programs do not provide the down time kids need. In an all day program kids get to explore more as it is spread out over time. All day would be more developmentally appropriate.

Laura Pike - Stated that all day kindergarten is not a replacement for child care and not a reason for consideration.

Brenda Robinson - Spoke about the prior work done by the SAU9 & 13 task force. They had suggested implementation of all day Kindergarten. Ready readers was cut last year, which was to help at risk Kindergarteners. An all day program might be able to address these kids' needs.

Unknown person - Asked about the chart handed out showing the difference in class time for programs being reduced. Kids need time for art & other specials, cutting time is not the answer.

Melanie McBrian - She has concerns on art reductions. Art creates a different way of thinking and makes students become a better thinker. This proposal would cut art time by one quarter to one half for students.

John Perkins - If the Library/Media/technology program is cut as proposed it will have a serious negative effect on education. A three day program would limit time to circulating books only. What would happen to the computer technology program?

Noel DeSousa - Spoke on the technology program. See possible scenario handout chart, it shows the least amount of class reduction time on the chart.

John Perkins - There used to be 140 hours of instruction time prior to this year. This year there is 70 hours of time. To reduce the program to three days there will not be a library/media program as it is now. He will only be able to do the library aide position of only dealing with books.

Laura Pike - One on one computing in the future is a possibility with reaching back into the individual classrooms for learning and work from classroom teachers. Not a separate stand alone computer/technology class.

Marcia McKenna - She has been the TAG teacher for nine years and has seen several changes over the years. The Board agreed to an English only program earlier. One hour per day means a lot to the children. Every child deserves to learn something new every day. Classroom work can be repetitive. In this class you can share with peers without being the strange kid in the class. It is a disservice to say it is just a reading program. The program opens eyes that the world is bigger. With paraprofessional help in the classroom this program could be turned inside out. You could modify the program to meet the needs now. Children on the edges are brought in and pushed to go further. She wishes that the board members would come in and see the program in work. 20% of the population serves the students needs. More in depth and critical thinking skills are used in this program.

Lee Custer - She believes in the TAG program, Alternative Education, and all day Kindergarten. Leveling everything will not help, some students need extra help.

Susan Colten - Questioned the moving of the SAU to this school. You could reduce overhead to keep programs for students in place. Jay McIntire received an estimate from engineers for \$20,000. to carve out an office from existing space. October 2011 is when the contract expires for the SAU office and he is trying to find vacant buildings in the area, looking for office space. Call Jay McIntire if anyone has any ideas or leads. They also look at the bidding process for fuel, etc.

Dan Rowe - There is a 20% reduction in enrollment so we should be able to use space for the SAU office in this building. We pay \$80,000 per year to run and maintain the SAU office. All three schools have declining enrollment. Moving the office into an existing facility is an option.

Jay McIntire - The SAU structure is highly inefficient. There are three small schools, four school boards, four contracts to negotiate. An informal committee met over the summer to see about joining with SAU 9, but evidence was not sufficient for a savings. We should be able to reduce the number of boards, reduce time needed in central office staff, and you could go to a part time superintendent. If you combined the three schools to form one unit, you would reduce personnel and expenses.

Laura Pike - Noted that shared services between schools is being looked at currently. It would make a more efficient model.

Peg Delong - Wants to know if it is similar to a cooperative school district. Jay McIntire stated that yes it is. Peg Delong stated that Tamworth wanted a cooperative in the past but the other two schools did not.

Juno Lamb - Would like the board to maintain instruction at 100%. She will post on the exchange information tomorrow on arts & education programs. Art teaches kids to experiment, and to fail, along with many other skills. Our current Art teacher is also the assistant principal. Everyone needs to talk to friends and neighbors to have them come and support the programs. Every year is different, be clear about your direction as we will have a new principal next year.

Chris Canfield - He is a parent and a teacher. Students from the TAG program are more prepared in humanities classes going to Kennett. He thanked the board members for the thankless job they do, along with Jay McIntire and Noel DeSousa. He is impressed by the pedagogy the art teacher uses and teaching across disciplines. You have to be careful regarding personalities in staff. You can judge a school by what goes on after school is over, staff at school participate after hours in various programs. You need to watch the demographic trends. Cuts made last year are creating a lot of disruptions so you need to figure out ways to incorporate the teachers into future decisions about what will or will not be cut. Tamworth does not have to do what everyone else does. This town does not have to follow the national model.

Gail Marrone - She is for early childhood education. Full day kindergarten would benefit working parents but we rush children, is a longer kindergarten developmentally appropriate. Some kids are still too young to be away from Mom too long. She is not convinced on a full day kindergarten program. You should give parents a choice for all day or half day. Children's eyes are not developed until they are seven years old. Kids need play time. Thank you to all the board members for your work.

Heidi King - She has no interest in full day kindergarten as she wants to be a part of her kids lives. She would like to see an option of half day. Ready readers was cut last year, but now you want to go to full day kindergarten.

Nancy Coville - This is her 49th year running Bearcamp. Do Kindergarten carefully when you do it, kids should be going out every single day. Obesity is a problem. This will not save child care needs for parents. Take the time to do it right. Five year olds

need time to explore and make connections, they need to make it their own. The program should fit the kids. It also needs leadership and time. She would be willing to help with the program if asked. Do not stress out the kids. You need to look for a strong leader in a new principal.

Heidi Fayle - She is an outdoor educator and parent. She believes there is a nature deficit disorder. She would also want to have a choice for Kindergarten being a full day or a half day.

Peg Custer - Thanked the board for their work. All day Kindergarten needs to be a modified, well thought out balanced program. Alternative education and poverty kids can't afford to go to daycare programs. The Behavior specialist is an important role. You need to show what a day would look like in full time kindergarten.

Lori Palmer - Everyone has an opinion regarding all day kindergarten and the school board must decide what is most important for our school. Have an option available that works for the students and parents. Specials being reduced and eliminated is not a philosophy, they are eliminated for financial reasons. Do not reduce or eliminate programs. She would like the board to present the budget as is to the town without cuts.

Madison Smith - Regarding kindergarten, there should be the option of half or full day programs. She supports the TAG program as it has made a difference for her in high school, as you need to write for every class you have.

Sarah Wright - Regarding full day Kindergarten, you need to give a choice for the towns population. She supports the TAG program and the benefits are great. It gives a lot of other options to students when they are going to Kennett. It is exciting and fun when you are challenged.

Melanie McBrian - You have to be a unique community to offer the minimal, other schools wished they had the programs we have. Do not let the programs we have go.

Eliza Burke - Stated that the TAG program gave her skills beyond her educational life. It expands your mind beyond what is in regular classes. It provides confidence and knowledge, the best education you can get. Do not cut the program that lets students excel or they may choose other school options. It is an opportunity to work hard and learn.

Thomas Chant - Stated that the TAG program is a fun experience. He wanted to know if grades 6-7-8 make up the middle school, would the classes be leveled. Noel DeSousa said there are different ways that the teachers will make these decisions. Social Studies and Science are not leveled currently. Thomas Chant feels that if the TAG program is cut and students join other peers in regular classes that the TAG students will not be challenged enough. Nobody likes budget cuts so stop it.

Gail ?? - She supports keeping the arts and alternative programs. If you are considering moving to one to one computing, you will still need a computer science person, as they may need to help the teachers. If the library is only open three days per week, how does that support the classroom. Many extra hours are put in by teachers, when you reduce days it reduces moral in the school. These teachers may need to find another job to help them which gives them less time they can spend here.

Deb Maille - This is not the year to do the full time Kindergarten for monetary issues. Take another year to study it more. Kindergarten should all be play and all students need to go outside also. Make all students go outside for the last half hour each day.

Willa Canfield - The TAG program is an essential part of school. Creative and beneficial projects are being tackled. It would be a big mistake to eliminate it.

Laura Pike - At the next board meeting on February 3rd at 5:30, the board will deliberate. The board will vote at the budget hearing at 7pm on that day. Visitor comments at the regular board session will be open for any other comments, before they deliberate. March 3rd is the annual meeting for voting.

Lori Palmer asked when changes to the budget will be shared.

Laura Pike will rearrange the normal agenda to hear visitor's comments before the deliberations.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:37pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathi S. Brown, Secretary
Approved Minutes 2-3-2010