

THE GLOUCESTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Our mission is for all students to be successful, engaged, lifelong learners.

**School Committee Public Hearing
on the FY20 Proposed School Budget**

Wednesday, April 3, 2019

District Office Conference Room
2 Blackburn Drive, Gloucester, MA

7:00 p.m.

Members Present

Jonathan Pope, Chairman
Kathy Clancy, Vice Chairperson
Tony Gross, Secretary
Melissa Teixeira Prince
Michelle Sweet
Joel Favazza

Administration Present

Dr. Richard Safier, Superintendent
Gregg Bach, Asst. Superintendent
Gary Frisch, Director of Finance
and Operations
Patty Wegmann, Director of Special Education
Grant Harris, IT Director
Brenden Henry, IT Systems Operation Manager
James Cook, GHS Principal
Lynne Beattie, O'Maley Principal
Jodi Gennodie, Beeman Principal
Amy Pasquarello, EGS Principal
Tammy Morgan, Plum Cove Principal
Dr. Telena Imel, West Parish Principal
Ann-Marie Jordan, Preschool Director
Cody Marshall, Accounts & Budget Specialist

Also Present

City Councilor Val Gilman
City Councilor Jen Holmgren

Recorded by 1623 Studios

- I. CALL TO ORDER** – Chairman Pope called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and stated the mission of the Gloucester Public Schools.
- II. SALUTE TO THE FLAG**
- III. INTRODUCTION** – Chairman Pope stated that the School Committee will review any public comments received tonight and vote on April 10th on a budget to be submitted to the Mayor. The Mayor then has approximately one month to pass it on to the City Council for their review. He indicated that, ultimately, the School Committee will get what the City Council passes and will then meet to reconcile the budget with what is passed by the City Council.
- IV. PROPOSED FY20 BUDGET PRESENTATION** – Dr. Safier presented a slide show on the proposed FY20 operating budget, which started as a level service budget and now

includes several additional requests from principals and department heads to adequately provide for the needs of students. He highlighted the objectives and initiatives of the District Improvement Plan, including curriculum review and revision, meeting individual student needs, effective use of data, Next Generation MCAS preparation, strengthening higher order thinking skills, technology, ELL students, and professional culture and community.

Dr. Safier reported that the proposed budget totals \$43,728,214, an increase of \$1,789,316 (4.27%) over this year's approved budget. He reviewed significant cost adjustments to the draft budget, including cost of living adjustments of approximately \$567,600, Step increases of \$415,825, lane changes of \$250,500, the loss of a grant, and an increase in health insurance costs of approximately \$400,000. He noted that there is currently a decrease in special education costs of approximately \$155,000. However, Ms. Wegmann indicated that next year we will be losing the tuition income of two students that are currently tuitioned into the district.

Dr. Safier reported that other cost adjustments to the budget include new elementary science textbooks, a decrease in out-of-district special education transportation, technology increases for safety equipment, and additional staff requested by principals and department heads, including additional help for ELL students.

Dr. Safier reviewed potential funding from the city and the cuts that would be required to reach certain percentage increases to this year's budget. He noted that the average percentage increase to the School Department's budget over the last four years was 2.44%, which would require cuts of approximately \$740,000.

Dr. Safier reviewed out-of-district special education tuitions, English Language Learner costs and health insurance costs over the last four years, as well as salaries funded by grants and revolving funds (i.e. not included in the operating budget). He also reviewed the capital needs of the district, including the GHS fieldhouse floor and bleachers and space for the preschool and administrative offices.

Finally, Dr. Safier reviewed the budget summary by department and the budget allocation by department over the last four years.

V. PUBLIC COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS – Chairman Pope opened the public hearing at 7:31 p.m. and clarified that the capital needs are not part of the operating budget.

Cynthia Mochowski of 13 Wall Street, Apartment 2, a GHS English teacher, stated that the proposed budget would keep the district at bare bones. She noted that the Mayor was quoted in the *Gloucester Daily Times* as saying, "They've had more money to work with than ever before." She would like the budget to be approved as is because the schools desperately need it. She pointed out that the high school lost an English teacher last year and it is essential that that department not be cut further. She stated that the schools actually need more money than what is included in the proposed budget and asked the committee and the Mayor not to take what little they have.

City Councilor Val Gilman of 75 Revere Street stated that she thinks it would be helpful for the City Council to see all in one slide or document the comparison over the last five years of out-of-district special education costs, health insurance costs, and a head count of the different schools. She also suggested including how many students come into the district mid-year, which changes the complexion of the budget.

Cecilia Coraza of 6 Naomi Drive stated that she was here two years ago and that many people have chosen not to come to these meetings anymore because they get patted on the head and that is the end of the conversation. She took issue with the fact that instead of putting the district's financial needs on the city, the district hired another CFO when Mr. Lafleur left, which cost the city and the taxpayers even more money. She indicated that prior to Mr. Farmer's tenure as superintendent, there was no School Department CFO. Ms. Coraza also stated that the budget is really confusing. She reported that the 2017 total expenditures were \$54 million plus an additional \$17 million on the city side, meaning that the school budget was \$71 million. She thinks that the taxpayers need to know that they are paying more than 60% of the total city budget to the schools. She also stated that we have lost 27.5% of the population, which gets us down to about 2,900 children, and the cost per child is \$24,000. She believes the majority of kids are not getting a \$24,000 education and are not college or career ready. Ms. Coraza thinks it is time for the School Committee to wake up and realize we need leadership that knows how to deal with low socioeconomic, non-English speaking and special education students. She stated that, with all due respect to teachers, the state website indicates that the average teacher salary is \$79,000, and there is no way that taxpayers should be paying 90% of their healthcare. She believes their contract needs to be renegotiated. She stated that there is also a \$300 million unfunded liability in this city that has to be addressed and indicated it is time to rethink how to successfully educate children.

Chairman Pope stated that he has been on the School Committee since 1998 and the School Department has always had a CFO.

Cynthia Mochowski stated that the return of the library aide position is important because the Media Specialist is pulled in many different directions and the library has to be closed many times. She also stated that it would be great to eventually have librarians at all the elementary schools.

Maggie Rosa of 26 Fort Hill Avenue, a member of the GHS site-based council, stated that she has had recent discussions about mentors for high school students and indicated that there is a need to keep the library open all the time. She stated that having it closed has been a detraction from the efforts of the Gloucester Writers' Center to help students with their college essays. She hopes that the City Council and the School Committee can work hard together to come to a budget that is beneficial to the students.

Chairman Pope closed the public hearing at 7:47 p.m.

VI. DISCUSSION – Kathy Clancy welcomed further input on the budget via email. Ms. Teixeira Prince stated that she realized that the committee may not have done the best job of educating the public on the needs of our students and why they are advocating for a budget with more than a 4% increase. Chairman Pope thanked everyone for coming.

VII. ADJOURNMENT – On a motion by Ms. Sweet, seconded by Ms. Teixeira Prince, it was unanimously

VOTED: 7 in favor, 0 opposed to adjourn the School Committee Public Hearing of April 3, 2019 at 7:51 p.m.

All reference documents and reports are filed in the Superintendent's office.

*Maria Puglisi
Recording Secretary*