

Minutes for Souhegan High School Finance Advisory Committee
January 2, 2007

In attendance: Allise deSmet, Dan Foley, Frances Harrow, Christine Morley, Marilyn Peterman, Julie Whitcomb, John Walsh-SHS School Board Representative

Guests: Kathy Skoglund; Director of Special Education, Kathy White, and Bruce Chakrin, Technology consultants

Special Education Discussion

Ms. Skoglund gave an introduction to the special education process and the expenses involved.

- An explanation of state aid which is referred to as catastrophic aid was given as reimbursement by the state of 80% of any expense the district incurs that is greater than 350% of the average state tuition for a regular education child. During 2006-2007 this amount is \$36,000. Souhegan also is reimbursed for certain services for Medicare eligible children. There are also IDEA grants available to help pay for direct services to children. The grants and aid income line contains this as well as the various Title monies.
- There were some questions about the alternative program which would be cut under the revised budget. Is there any way to demonstrate that this program could pay for itself? Ms. Skoglund discussed the impact of students who are in the high school and need supports to successfully complete the program. These students often can not stay in the regular education system and be successful. This population can add special education costs if they can not be maintained in the regular education system.
- There was some discussion of alternative programs in other schools that include on-line courses; alternative curriculum and hours, different ways of assessing students as well as other programs. The \$26,500 would extend the day for some staff and allow teachers to expand their teaching load.
- The out of district expenses appear to be growing from the 2006 budget to the 2007 budget at a high percentage. However, some of these students are actually being covered in the 2006 budget, but could not be planned for as their needs were not known when the 2006 budget was developed. Therefore the increase appears greater than it actually is. Souhegan just participated in a statewide survey regarding money spent on services and salaries and we are consistently at or below the average level.
- There was clarification that a great deal of the increased expense in next year's special education budget is accounted for by the students moving from 8th to 9th grade. There is a need for additional consultants, staff, staff training and related services for students. This will even out over time and the increase will not continue at next year's rate.

Technology Discussion

- Kathy White introduced the budgeting process and there was some discussion and clarification of the “five year plan.” Last year should have been part of the replacement cycle and one lap top cart and many desk top units were cut from that budget.
- Last year there was a committee formed that planned how to deal with the replacement cycle. The cycle was elongated from three years to four years. This would flatten the cost of replacement to approximately \$180,000 per year. Last year there were significant cuts and the replacement did not begin as planned. This leaves five to seven year old machines on line. There is also some discussion about using central servers, which could decrease the cost over time. This approach has pros and cons depending on the software involved and space needs.
- There is a major cost of five servers that are old and need to be replaced. Three of these are shared with Amherst and Mt. Vernon. Two are Souhegan only. There is also one new server that will support the Angel Software.
- There was clarification as to what software and hardware was contained in each of the lines. There is infrastructure software, instructional software as well as the new Angel course management software.
- With level 1 reduction there is no decrease in the hardware replacement schedule. With level 2 cuts there is major reduction in replacement equipment. The desktops can function but often cannot perform the tasks needed. There is also a possible level 3 set of cuts that would allow some replacement equipment. However, this makes increases in the budget a yearly event rather than level funding for budgeting replacement equipment. There was some question about the cuts in the library budget and whether or not it is feasible to not update the cataloging software.
- In discussion the Advisory committee generally agreed that the level one cuts were acceptable with an emphasis on funding educational needs. It was mentioned that the user fee for sports could be increased and a discussion as to the advantage of level funding of technology versus the advantage of having the budget increase less.

The board voted to accept the minutes from last meeting with a correction to the spelling of Allise deSmet’s name and the addition that Julie Whitcomb in attendance.

The SHS Board will meet on January 3rd and 11th. The Advisory committee will meet as needed around these meetings.

