The meeting was called to order at 1:35 PM. Those present included Committee Chair Matt Kelley, Vice Chair Melissa Martin, and member Jim Roberti; Superintendent David Lussier, Assistant Superintendent Cindy Mahr, and Director of Student Services Lori Cimeno; and Advisory Committee liaisons Jane Andrews and Lina Musayev. Those not present included Secretary Linda Chow and member Sharon Gray.

FY20 BUDGET DEBRIEF

Mr. Kelley opened the meeting with a brief introduction of the purpose, to debrief on the FY20 budget process. There was discussion of the following points:

- There was broad consensus that the internal budget process followed by the Superintendent and School Committee, with participation of the Advisory Committee liaisons was largely successful. The Administration presented a clear proposal, in line with Committee guidance, and there was ample discussion at various Committee meetings and in the presentation to the Advisory Committee.
- Ms. Mahr was recognized for providing detailed and accurate information, and seeking input on what information in the FY20 budget book was particularly helpful or not, and what changes might be made in future years.
- There was strong consensus that the process by which the Board of Selectmen set the Committee’s budget guideline, as well as subsequent engagement with the Board, was unsatisfactory. There is a clear desire to do a better job in this area in future years, particularly including engagement with the Board earlier in the process in order to provide more background on projected School needs.
- The Committee discussed the possibility of educating the parent community and other interested constituents on the timeline of the budgeting process. By the time the Committee is discussing specific proposals in the January timeframe, the broad strokes of the budget have already been set. There was consensus that the community needs to be engaged in the process much earlier, including the timeframe during which the Board of Selectmen is considering and setting budget guidelines.
- Ms. Andrews recommended that the Committee closely consider how Town Hall views School budget turnback, including its impact on views of what an appropriate School budget might be.
- One issue driving perception of the FY20 School budget was consideration of what the appropriate level and rate of investment in the Strategic Plan is. Only a
very small percentage of the budget represents Strategic Plan investments. Given that investments in the FY20 budget represented initiatives that had first been described when the plan was initially published, in the 2013-2014 school year, Committee members felt that there had not been an inappropriate rush to fund those initiatives.

- There was discussion of the relationship between the potential long-term capital investments related to the Hardy, Hunnewell, and Upham facilities projects and future School operating budgets.
- Ms. Mahr described different approaches to budgeting, based on her experience in other districts. She described Weston’s inclusive process in which the Schools and Town collaborate on the overall budget picture, including projected level service expenses and revenue assumptions, leading to a joint agreement on where investments on top of level service will be made. She also described Lexington and Brookline as having “revenue sharing agreements”, under which the Schools and other Town departments agree on how new revenue will be allocated across the overall budget.
- Mr. Roberti described his priority of funding positions and initiatives that directly impact students, rather than administrative positions. There was general agreement with that priority, although Dr. Lussier pointed out that the District’s Administration budget is very low, on a percentage basis, compared with our peer districts. He also described that, while perhaps not “popular”, some level of administrative support is necessary to properly support and drive student-focused initiatives.
- Mr. Kelley suggested adding an additional step in the budget process, immediately after the Administration presents its budget proposal, during which Committee members could have an initial discussion of the budget and collaboratively produce a list of questions for the Administration, rather than each member doing so independently. Dr. Lussier and Ms. Mahr suggested ways in which more specificity on questions would help the efficiency of the process.

**ADJOURNMENT**

At approximately 3:10 PM, upon a motion made by Ms. Martin and seconded by Mr. Roberti, the Committee unanimously VOTED to adjourn.

Respectfully submitted,

Matt Kelley
Chair