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<http://www.seacoastonline.com/news/20170124/new-program-proposed-to-meet-special-education-needs-in-york>

New program proposed to meet special education needs in York

By David Ramsay

YORK - At its second budget meeting last week, the York School Committee heard the final departmental Fiscal Year 2018 budget requests, including proposed funding for special education, which has increased over the past year to meet the growing and changing needs of students.

The special education budget is proposed to increase by \$590,000, Director of Finance and Operations Jim Amoroso said. The overall \$32.7 million budget is a 6.33 percent increase over last year.

Special Education Administrator Erin Frazier explained to the School Committee that the overall increases are being driven by the increased needs in the district. "What's driving some of the increases is the extent of student needs. Children have far greater needs now. There are greater numbers of autism and more significant health impairments that we are dealing with," she said. "We have an unexpected increase in the number of out-of-district placements, which is of concern."

The special education program serves 210 children, Frazier said. Of that number, 15 students are bused for services out-of-district.

"A lot of thought that I have been doing is how do we bring these students back, how do we have them participating in their community school and how do we increase services and also trust in the community around special education," Frazier said.

To address these needs, Frazier proposed a new program, which involves participation in the **New England Center for Children** that supports children with autism, she said. Adding this

program would cost \$80,000 but would only increase the budget by \$17,800 if they eliminated the new "inclusion coordinator" position, which needs could be met by training existing staff.

Frazier praised the NECC program, which is "evidence based and highly effective," and that has "a high reputation around the world." NECC would provide training, oversight and professional development, she added.

The out-of-district placements are for students, whose needs cannot be currently met with the resources in the district, she said, and these expenses are increasing. By improving the in-district special education programming, some students can be brought back to the district, saving the district significant money, she added. In some cases the district does not have a choice in placing students out-of-district, when a parent has initiated the action.

"I think that out-of-district placements will drastically reduce under these improvements," Frazier said.

The special education budget also includes a request for \$97,000 for legal fees, an increase from \$20,000 last year. A total of \$196,000 was budgeted the year before.

"That's a \$77,000 increase," said School Committee member Dick Bachelder. "I'm trusting that it's going to be every bit of that."

Other school departments presented their budget requests.

Committee members praised the work of Director of School Nutrition Whitney Strout who described the innovative programs of her department. The department has made great strides in providing more fresh fruits and vegetables, obtaining more local produce and growing and harvesting vegetables from the school garden.

In addition, committee members were pleased with the work of Adult Education Director Lisa Robertson, whose budget has been stable, while growing programs to meet the needs of youth, working adults and immigrants needing to learn English.

Robertson explained to the committee how the enrichment program that generates revenues from fees has been able to subsidize programs for helping youth and adults meet the requirements for a high school equivalency diploma, help adults with academic skills and knowledge needed on the job and provide fluency training for recent immigrants.

Director of Community Programs Melanie Ladd told the committee about the success she has had in recruiting and placing volunteers throughout the schools. Committee members were complimentary of her efforts that involved 30,000 volunteer hours and over 900 volunteers, including students, parents, grandparents and community volunteers, which she said translated into \$706,000 worth of services for the school district.

At the close of the budget meeting Superintendent Debra Dunn told the committee that there would be a need for an additional budget meeting before the budget was ready to present to the

public. The proposed new positions, including a new assistant principal, a literacy specialist, and a custodian for the new auditorium, each at the high school, were not yet factored into the budget.

"We're not where we need to be right now," Dunn said. "We have to get this down, so we're looking at if we can reallocate where there's attrition. We're looking really closely at all our staffing."

The next budget meeting was scheduled for 7 p.m. on Tuesday Jan. 24 including deliberation, and on Monday Jan. 30 at 7 p.m., which will include deliberation and a public hearing, both held at the York Library.

"Clearly, we have a lot to think about and some more work to do," said Chairwoman Julie Eneman.