

Proposal to freeze hiring in schools falls flat

NASHUA

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School board member Paula

Johnson calls for level-funded budget.

By Kimberly Houghton

Union Leader Correspondent

A proposal to level-fund Nashua schools and freeze all new hiring because of the COVID-19 pandemic failed to gain traction with school officials this week.

Families are struggling financially as some individuals have lost their jobs, explained school board member Paula Johnson.

“We need to freeze right now until we see what is going to happen,” Johnson told her colleagues on Wednesday.

During the board’s budget meeting, Johnson recommended that instead of supporting the superintendent’s proposed \$115 million budget for fiscal year 2021, that school officials adopt a level-funded budget — identical to the current spending plan — and freeze all new hires.

Senior citizens are on fixed incomes, some people are not currently working and it is unclear whether some families will be able to pay their property taxes, according to Johnson, who added student enrollment is declining.

The overall city budget, as proposed, is more than \$284 million; if all of the city departments receive

the funds requested, taxes could go up 4.5%, Johnson said.

“That can be a big hit on the city,” maintained Johnson.

None of Johnson’s fellow school board members supported her recommendation.

“Our needs are always greater than our budget,” said school board member Sandra Ziehm.

Each year the district is faced with budget concerns and must reduce some of its spending requests, according to Ziehm, who said class sizes at the high school are large and the district has dealt with personnel shortages.

Others agreed, saying it is too premature to level-fund the budget and freeze hiring, some calling it a drastic action that could devastate certain programs within the schools.

Superintendent Jahmal Mosley is recommending the hiring of 22 new staff members in his proposed \$115 million budget, which is a 2.81% increase, or \$3.15 million over the current spending plan; Mayor Jim Donchess is seeking a budget increase of no more than 2.25% from the district.

Using the school district’s new strategic plan as a guide, Mosley is requesting

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