

**New Hartford Public Schools
Board of Education Special Meeting (In-Person)
Ann Antolini Elementary School – Library
February 21, 2024 @ 6:00PM**

PRESENT: Superintendent Jeffrey Sousa; Chairman Timothy Klepps; Vice Chairman Thomas Buzzi; Members: Meagan Albert; Timothy Russell; Deirdre Tindall; Kristin Young, Frank Rodenberg; Board Secretary Penny Miller and Recording Secretary Elizabeth Domas.

Also present: Michael Lynch, Amy Kennedy, Kelly Carroll, Heather Mathes and members of the public Jay Bailey.

ABSENT: Kelly O’Dell Longhi

A. Chair to Open Meeting: @ 6:00PM the meeting was called to order by Chairman Timothy Klepps.

B. Pledge of Allegiance

C. Communications to the Board of Education/Public Comment:

Two emails were received by Superintendent Jeffrey Sousa, the first from Sue Lundin, regarding an armed officer, she served on this Board (Education) for 15 years. Sue Lundin is opposed to having armed personnel in the schools. The second email is a thank you from Laura Shears, referencing what she referred to as “mail delivery” for staff efforts to exchange the wrong items sent between her children in different schools.

Jay Bailey (575 Main Street) said he feels the three schools need to be consolidated, he states a process should be started now, to get grants to build a “state of the art school” in order and create a committee. Mr. Bailey thinks the Board needs to consider consolidation; the armed security officer also needs a monitor in addition, as one person cannot protect the entire school.

D. Board of Education Chair’s Report: First, Mr. Timothy Klepps thanked everybody for coming to the meeting and being flexible with the change in time since the regular meeting was rescheduled. Secondly, Mr. Klepps stated an item was added to tonight’s agenda, and reminded everyone that the Board has a policy in place to allow items to be added to the agenda that were not posted as long as there is a 2/3 vote at a regular meeting. As the Board enters the budget, he appreciates everybody’s effort and attention to the needs of the schools.

E. Superintendents Report:

1. School Security Grant Updates: The Board of Finance supported/permitted the recommendations at the last Board of Finance meeting (Tuesday February 13, 2024), to

move funds to meet the local security grant match. This reallocation consisted of \$20,000 from paving of the walkway, which was changed over to Indoor Air Quality, IAQ costs \$15,675 and left \$4,325. In addition, rotting trim for \$10,000 and the remainder of the technology budget under Capital for \$35,000. Mr. Jeff Sousa will provide a revised capital expenditures sheet.

2. Amendment to Non Lapsing Account: The Board of Finance had approved a transfer of \$100,000 in September of 2023 into the non-lapsing account. The Board of Education fiscal office had calculated that there was \$25,000 in savings at the end of the fiscal year. Upon further review during the audit, it was discovered there was only \$14,898 in this account, because tuition checks received by the Board of Education were used to pay staff salaries, Mr. Sousa noted that the has learned revenues cannot be used to pay expenses. The Board of Finance amended their recommendation to move \$14,898 to the non-lapsing account, allowing for the audit to be completed.
3. **2024-2025 Budget Presentation:** Superintendent Jeff Sousa completed a budget snapshot timeline of important dates, please see attachments for further details. Important budget drivers this year consist of a 11.6 % increase in healthcare, \$100,000 (less) pandemic relief funding, contractual increases, Special Education costs increasing, contracted transportation costs, Governors proposed education cuts, and the contingency with MERA unions. The overall 2024-2025 proposed Superintendents budget contains an 8.17% increase which equates to an increase of \$769,364.

Michael Lynch (Director of Student Services) did a presentation on the Special Education needs within this new proposed budget, Special Education Services has seen a 27% increase in the number of students receiving special education, 28 additional students since March 2023. Mr. Lynch stated speech services has had a caseload increase of 57%, Mike Lynch is suggesting increasing a speech pathologist who is already an employee from 3 to 4 days a week due to increased caseload. She had a 24% increase in IEP hours serviced and went from 14 to 23 students. Mr. Lynch stated the budget proposes the Occupational Therapist be increase from 4 days a week to be a full-time employee, since September 2023 the caseload increased by about 42%. For the 2022-2023 school year, she started with roughly 13 students and now has over 50. The next position discussed was a school counselor. A school counselor position was hired using temporary grant funding which expires this year. Since she was hired in September, she has completed 350 student sessions. In order to keep this position, it would need to be added to the budget. Student enrollment has increased from last year, which is currently at 456, Mr. Sousa noted the accurate projection of the number of students is difficult to determine who will enroll and who will not, it is projected that there will be a decrease to 438 students next year, move ins and homeschool number have changed, some magnet students' parents changing their mind to come back to public schools. Penny Miller asked if the new birth date requirement of September 1st to attend kindergarten will have an increase or decrease on the enrollment? Mr. Sousa did not think we would see a change in enrollment this year, but possibly next year there may be a change in numbers depending on legislation in the next year.

Mr. Sousa began presenting the Regular Education budget. Mr. Sousa noted under Regular Education Professional Salaries an increase of \$163,377.37 which is 6.6% is to maintain small class sizes and cover the overages due to an expiring Behavioral Health Grant. Additionally, because of an increase in kindergarten enrollment and to maintain small class sizes, another teacher was added. The number of substitute teachers is slightly increasing. Mr. Sousa noted small changes in teacher stipends. Regarding CREC Magnet Schools, the original proposal was to have a cap on what the district pays to magnet schools for tuition, however that cap has been proposed to be removed by the state and the magnet schools can increase their tuition, which the Town is liable to pay 100% of. Mr. Sousa noted under textbooks and resources substantial savings thanks to a Right to Read Grant. The main driver in the Regular Education budget, which has an overall 2.7% increase, is salaries including the additional hiring of another employee (school counselor).

Mr. Sousa continued presenting the Special Education budget, the Special Education Professional Staff Salaries is proposed to increase \$200,731.80 which is 23%. A registered behavior tech was hired and fully funded by grants which are the IDEA 611, IDEA 619 and ARPA School Mental Health Specialist. Moving a staff member to full time has created an increase in the Occupational Therapy line. Testing supplies have increased to meet the needs of the students. Outplacements tuition is projected to increase \$26,000. The Special Education proposed budget increases by \$410,035.37 or 20.9%. Special Education contains about 25% of the student population, about 110 students. Frank Rodenberg noted the number of students receiving special education has tripled, there's a sense that this is a problem that will need to be addressed because the amount will continue to grow. The increase in Special Education is more than half of the proposed budget increase. Mr. Rodenberg has seen more testing and feels more and more students do not grow out of Special Education, meaning students who enter Special Education are less likely to graduate out of the program. Mr. Sousa noted New Hartford does the best to provide for the students. Thomas Buzzi asked how many individuals are included in the salaries in the Special Education budget, and what are their roles? Mr. Sousa stated he did not have a number and would need to get back to the Board. Mr. Buzzi inquired about the deciding factors on how many Special Educators are actually needed and how they go about deciding this number. Every student has an annual meeting and then evaluated for Special Education every three years. Deirde Tindall noted her positive thoughts using her knowledge based on a personal experience with Special Education. Mr. Timothy Klepps noted the Board requests a staff breakdown in the Special Education section with an alternative look at if they were to be out placed what is the cost versus the two options. Mr. Sousa noted the average cost of outplacement is \$170,000 per student.

Adult Education noted a small increase of \$200 through EdAdvance.

Mr. Sousa then went through Health Services, which is nurse's salaries and nurse substitutes, that have seen small increases, overtime has been added to the health services \$500, for an "end of the day" need. Sousa noted the total increase in Health Services is \$2,978 or a 2.1% increase, Mr. Sousa stated that nurses provide a lot of care and support beyond just medical needs.

Improvement of Instruction was next, it was stated the name of Innovative Teaching was changed to Curriculum Software, innovated teaching will be removed from the technology line and rather be part of the curriculum. Mr. Klepps verified the \$28,000 is a transfer and being

placed where necessary, which will be seen later on deducted from technology. The grand total for Improvement of Instruction is a \$24,500 increase or 64.1%.

Library Media Centers, noted specifically online subscriptions that pertain to library media centers, are proposed to see slight increase of \$4,350 or 37.5%.

Under technology the circular online resources were moved to curriculum support, noting the transfer of funds to Improvements of Instruction.

The Board of Education 2310 section, an addition of \$1,000 for Recognition and Hospitality which is a 100% and did not calculate correctly therefore the final total at the bottom should say \$41,225 instead of \$40,225, leading to a \$900 increase overall.

In the Central Office proposed budget, Superintendent Jeff Sousa noted the increase in salaries, please see spreadsheet for a breakdown and the removal of line 593 printing, which will be done internally.

Under School Offices section 2410 it was noted the increase in salaries for Principals and Secretaries according to contracted language. Travel has been added as administrators travel, it was stated this should be its own line item rather than embedded in another line item.

Plant Operations covers any purchases, building maintenance and custodial salaries, Sousa noted that we used over 35,000 gallons of heating oil approximately. Purchasing oil in bulk leads to a .10 cent per gallon savings overall. Four full-time custodians and part-time custodians make up the salaries in this section. Emergency repairs consists of funds needed for instances like broken windows, dishwashers that need replacement, or any other unanticipated building repairs, this line item in one that is difficult to project. In this proposed budget the increase is 32.1%, which is \$17,000. Mr. Sousa briefly went through the list of Service Contracts. Property and Liability Insurance is listed, numbers given to the Town by CIRMA, the increase is 3.0% or \$1,290. By partnering with EdAvance there is a \$5,000 savings in heating oil. The total increase in Plant Operations is \$30,789.40 or 3.7%.

One of the main increases in employee benefits is Medical/Dental Insurance, that is contracted with Brown & Brown, who has notified the Town of a 11.6% increase in the dollar amount of \$151,017. There were increases in the Social Security and Medicare lines, but there were pleasant savings in the Pensions Funds line in the amount of \$51,328, this information was provided to Mr. Sousa by the First Selectman. The admin travel line was transferred to the admin section and removed from the employee benefits section. The grand total dollar variance for employee benefits was an increase of \$131,672.59 or 7.5%.

Pupil Transportation is contracted rates, with Dattco, this is how the students get to and from school and are based on two to three year contracts also working with region 7, there is a 11.4% increase with a dollar variance of \$86,804.

No major changes are seen under Communications in the two lines of Postage and Job Postings, which are done electronically.

Mr. Sousa discussed the Preliminary Capital Expenditure Requests for the 2024-2025 budget, which totals \$285,515, some examples include replacement of outdated equipment such staff laptops, Security grant local matching, IAQ (conducted every year)/HVAC (conducted every 5 years), painting (removed from previous budget) and walkway repair. Mr. Sousa noted the suggestion made by Penny Miller to include more dates in the budget timeline. He will address these dates and re-send the timeline in addition to posting publicly. Penny Miller inquired to Mr. Sousa about Computer Labs within the schools. Mr. Sousa noted the technology is more mobile, that there is no computer lab as there once was, currently kids can have their Chrome

Books wherever they are instead of a singular room. Frank Rodenberg brought to the Boards attention the “Armed Security Officer” was not listed within the proposed budget. Mr. Sousa noted the position is not included in the budget until the policy is completed and a job description is created. Mr. Klepps noted the major budget pressure and his request of the Board to go through this budget again before the next meeting on Tuesday March 5, 2024, where major concerns can be addressed to Superintendent Jeff Sousa.

F. Routine Business:

Approval of Minutes: February 6, 2024 (Regular Meeting)

MOTION by Penny Miller to approve the minutes from the February 6, 2024, Regular Meeting as presented. Second by Kristin Young.

UNANIMOUS
Motion passes

G. Old Business:

1. Policy and Regulation 5142.2 Armed Security Officer – 2ND READING

MOTION by Tim Russell to approve Policy and Regulation 5142.2 Armed Security Officer. Second by Frank Rodenberg.

Aye: Timothy Klepps; Thomas Buzzi; Meagan Albert; Penny Miller; Timothy Russell; Deirdre Tindall; and Frank Rodenberg

Naye: Kristin Young

Motion Passes (7-1)

2. Policy 4117.6 Personnel - Certified – Exit Survey/Interviews – 2ND READING

MOTION by Tim Russell to approve Policy 4117.6 Personnel – Exit Survey/Interviews. Second by Frank Rodenberg.

UNANIMOUS
Motion Passes

3. Bylaw 9323 – Construction of the Agenda – 2ND READING

MOTION by Thomas Buzzi to approve Bylaw 9323 – Construction of the Agenda. Second by Deirdre Tindall.

UNANIMOUS
Motion Passes

4. Bylaw 9324 – Advanced Delivery of Meeting Materials – 2ND READING

MOTION by Timothy Klepps to approve Bylaw 9324 – Advanced Delivery of Meeting Materials. Second by Deirdre Tindall.

UNANIMOUS
Motion Passes

H. New Business:

- 1. Discussion & Possible Action on ASO:** Next steps regarding the policy would be to create a job description, created by the security sub-committee, discussed under Executive Session. Kristin Young is not in favor of the Armed Security Officer, feels the ASO is premature and

would add too much to the budget. Deirdre Tindall states the Board has been working on the ASO for a year and a half now and feels this process should move forward, noting the budget is not going down and is aware Special Education will continue to increase. Deirdre Tindall is in favor of no further delay in this process and strongly feels now is the time to act, she stated “at what point do we not put money in place to protect our children?” Kristin Young wants to understand that if this is actually necessary, was every avenue explored? Was the possibility of unarmed security explored as a way to keep the liability of a firearm out of the school. Tim Russell states he feels the point of an armed security officer is to deter individuals from bringing weapons into the schools.

MOTION by Tim Russell to move forward with hiring an armed security officer. Second by Deirdre Tindall.

MOTION-AMENDED by Tim Russell to move forward with armed security officer, get through to posting this for employment and whatever steps need to be taken to do that. Second by Deirdre Tindall.

MOTION-AMENDED(3rd) by Tim Russell to move forward through the next steps up to and including creating a job description, posting, interviewing and hiring. Second Deirdre Tindall.

After discussion, both Tim Russell and Deirde Tindall rescind their motion and second.

Penny Miller clarified Mr. Sousa stated a job description needed to be completed as the next step in hiring an armed security officer. Frank Rodenberg feels we are going out of order and bundling three different steps. There are too many unknowns, such as hours and benefits in order to vote. Penny Miller inquires as to what the next step should be instead of bundling and also stated concern that prior to hiring an armed security officer, it should be known to the Board why a majority of the teachers who are in the buildings with the students say no, that they do not want an armed security officer. Did we ever get the answer to why? Thomas Buzzi stated it is unlikely there will be someone in the building by the end of the school year. Deirdre Tindall agrees with Thomas Buzzi that the proper steps need to be taken as the goal is to move forward. Penny Miller notes that if an armed security officer is hired, this position would need to be added to the budget therefore increasing the budget to more than the projected 8.17%. The next step would be to schedule a meeting with the security subcommittee prior to the budget presentation to the Board of Finance on Saturday March 16, 2024.

MOTION by Tim Russell to move forward to the next step in the hiring of an armed security officer which will include creation of the job description, the job description will include a salary range and benefits it will also establish the process for interviewing, write down the process. Second by Deirde Tindall.

Aye: Timothy Klepps; Thomas Buzzi; Meagan Albert; Timothy Russell; Deirdre Tindall; and Frank Rodenberg

Naye: Penny Miller and Kristin Young

Motion Passes (6-2)
Everyone in attendance left the meeting.
The Board and Superintendent Sousa remained for executive session.

I. Executive Session

1. Personnel Matter

MOTION by Penny Miller to enter executive session at 8:08PM to discuss a personnel matter and to invite Superintendent Jeff Sousa to join the Board of Education.

UNANIMOUS
Motion Passes

Executive Session ended at 8:20PM.

MOTION by Penny Miller to approve the request for an extended unpaid leave and to cover the cost share for medical and dental insurance for the remainder of the unpaid leave. Second by Tim Russell.

UNANIMOUS
Motion Passes

J. Adjournment

MOTION by Penny Miller to adjourn the meeting at 8:21PM. Second by Deirdre Tindall.

UNANIMOUS
Motion Passes

Motions following executive session were provided by Penny Miller to the recording secretary.

Respectfully submitted by,
Elizabeth Domas, Recording Secretary

Recorded Regular and Special Board of Education meetings will be posted to:
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCX-ZlomWmjG81dc_QM3rfg

Attachments:
Sue Lundin Email
Laura Shears Email
2024-2025 Superintendent's Proposed Budget