

MINUTES

Hoosac Valley Regional School Committee
School Committee Meeting
Monday, March 13, 2023 - 6:30 p.m.
Cheshire Elementary School
191 Church Street, Cheshire, MA

PRESENT: Mike Mucci, John Duval, Mike Henault, Regina Hill, Adam Emerson, Bethany DeMarco, Erin Milne

ABSENT:

OTHERS: Superintendent Aaron Dean

104027 Call to Order

Chairman Mike Mucci called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

104028 Approval of Minutes - February 6, 2023

MOTION: On Motion of Mike Henault and second by Regina Hill:

VOTED: to approve the February 6, 2023. The vote was 6-0-1

104029 Report of Treasurer/Business Manager - discussion under Budget Hearing

104030 Report of Sub Committee -

A. Audit & Evaluation - discussion under Budget Hearing

104031 Communications -

Optimal Healing Presentation - Aaron: we want to better support our students, optimal healing came to Courtney and asked what they can do for our school district. It is apparent the community has a number of mental health needs that are trickling into our schools. Courtney introduced herself; she is the school psychologist and works with students in all three buildings. This is her 5th year working in the district. Ashley introduced herself and is the owner of optimal healing. Optimal healing's vision is to develop a community that supports the individual journey towards finding balanced physical, emotional, and relational well-being. An individual is encouraged to take an active role in the vitality of those parts that make one feel complete, building and connecting a resilient collective. Ashley spoke about the team at optimal health and their backgrounds. Courtney: coming off of COVID we have seen a lot of kids they haven't seen. They have a lot more needs from a social/emotional standpoint. This event has been very traumatic for their mental health. Our staff is overwhelmed and they need more resources for our students. We are now one year later, proposed this last spring, piloted with a small group at the middle and high school last year with 2 of the clinicians, we learned from that pilot. What worked, what didn't work. Over the summer we had Michael Smith do some PD opportunities, through our summer institute, with our staff which was well received. One of the clinicians did some 1:1 with our students at the summer program. This year we did 2 sessions, in the middle of spring session now, and extended it to the elementary school, which we are now serving grades 2 - 12. Essentially we have 35 and 33 between the 2 sessions. We added a clinician this year to meet those needs and are basing it on parent referrals. The groups are 10 weeks, an hour each, once a week, always evolving and talking as a team. Make sure we are helping kids the best we can.

Ashley: What students should expect from OH groups: try to create a regime for students. Students have an opportunity to connect with the therapist. Wrap around support to students regarding continuity of care; Work on components of understanding anxiety, trauma.

Mutually desired outcomes: clinicians do a pre interview to see if they are ready for the group and at the end they ask similar questions to see if things have changed - pre and post interviews.

Staff outcome data: 100% agreed there was good communication; 60% agreed that students were excited about weekly groups - criticisms is that 10 weeks isn't long enough and sharing of skills with staff.

Parent outcome data: 100% agree that referral was easy and communication about the groups was good; More than half noted that their child shared experiences about the group; 86% agree that their child was excited about groups and felt positively about their child's outcome after the 10 week session. Criticisms - more communication with families, need more than 10 weeks.

Future planning: utilizing DESE mental health grant to screen students for targeted and tiered interventions - using the screening data to identify students for small group work and 1:1; using screening data to identify skill deficits; Continuing collaboration next year in all buildings - taking feedback from surveys to make changes.

Mike Mucci: 10 weeks at 1 hour each week, when is it happening? Courtney during the WIN blocks so as not being pulled from their core classes.

Mike Henault: Are we doing universal screening in all 3 schools? Courtney: won't be doing it in all three schools to start. It's very intentional with the universal screening starting with classrooms, the population within a grade and growing that to make sure it's sustainable. If we screened everybody prek-12 we would have a lot of kids we have to support - we don't have the capacity to do that yet. Looking at the high school to start and looking to grow that as much as we can.

Mike Mucci: The DESE grant - is that for the upcoming school year? Courtney: We have it for the spring, need to use it by June and then if we meet the requirements, we are able to tap into another grant for next year. Regina: Are there other grants available? Aaron: We utilized ESSER for this project. Certain we will be able to find something along the way. Regina: a great program and I'm a strong proponent of kids having some type of therapy.

Adam: Will we have data to see how effective this is? Aaron: There are several ways to measure it, a lot of students coming into this program are coming through the BBT process, getting referred for particular reasons so you will see more success in the classroom typically. They have behavior plans within those settings so you are going to see data on that. We will have metrics in place to see how effective this is. We have panorama, social/emotional benchmarks, we definitely have a lot of data at our disposal really pulling it together in a meaningful way.

The committee thanked Courtney and Ashley for their presentation.

104032 Report of Superintendent -

A. Budget Hearing - Aaron: As we dig into this budget, it is about making sure we have high quality instructional materials, high leverage teaching practices in the district, and the things we are implementing we are implementing with proper support. Excited year in terms of the revenue part. We did get a 7.7% increase in Chapter 70. We are finally getting appropriate funds to meet the many needs of the district. When you get appropriate state aid, it lessens the burden on the local communities. Budget Page 1: Revenue based – increase in Chapter 70; tuition reimbursement for the charter school went down because our tuition for the charter school went down, still some adjusting on those, there are a couple of things that happened on the state end on the data; Foundation assessment: this includes what the state says is an appropriate minimum number that the town should go up but also includes the number we are looking for above the minimum and for a first time in a while that piece will remain level while there are increases in the minimum: Adams foundation assessment - up \$232,665 (4.5%) and Cheshire foundation assessment - up \$43,326 (1.7%); typical medicaid reimbursement, those are services for reimbursement for OT/PT, etc. able to access funds for providing those services; Athletic Director - half of his salary is coming back to us from North Adams, we invoice them for shared services; E & D appropriations - putting forward a budget that will significantly decrease the amount of money that we carry over from E & D, looking at the number of \$75,000 - first year as Superintendent that number was \$675,000 that money is carried from previous budget every year to fund the budget next year, it is not great in terms of practice. This is a big step and an excellent reset for us. Any additional increase for the town is going to be to offset that number .

State reimbursement for transportation is down, able to eliminate a bus which helped us. Dufour has done a nice job with us and around the contract.

Capital Revenue: coming off the books

The bottom line is 21,385,195 budget up \$759,756 for a 3.68% increase

Erika: Charter tuition - the cherry sheet put out by the state had us at \$133,000 - always conservatively with that number, not only do our numbers fluctuate but the reimbursement fluctuates in an attempt to not get us caught in the negative but conservatory budgeting down, not significantly. Transportation dropped because we dropped a bus and won't be able to receive reimbursement on that cost. We always give back more as a reimbursement to the town reducing their assessments than what we get in. We are pulling from our revolving fund in giving more than what our actual reimbursement was, we do it off the top than in the end. In the end they are still receiving the benefit we get from the state plus some. This new Chapter 70 amount is now our baseline; we won't receive less than that moving forward. We don't have to worry about going backwards.

Erine Milne: members towns foundation assessment? Held level, but looks like it's increased? Aaron: The increase most is from the municipal minimum. When you look at the overall number of the towns, you are going to see less than what you see there. That particular line is going up but you have transportation and capital cost coming down overall.

The next few pages are the overview of all the different areas and get in details in the upcoming pages

Budget Page 2: School building leadership up 23.6% - talked about high quality curriculum materials, high leverage teaching practices, we added through ESSER funds, 2 Assistant Principals of teaching and learning. These are key positions to leverage our work moving forward. Provided job embedded professional development, they really are keeping an eye on the curriculum side to make sure we have appropriate support and materials, working with coaches where we purchased the curriculum and looking at ways to support the teachers and students. Across the state, that is the norm in terms of leadership in the building. We have added a curriculum line for the first time - we were relying on grants in the past. We are supporting things like making sure we have consumables and also including the salary of our curriculum director which is another key position moving forward, this work is far too complex to not have staff keeping an eye on this work.

Going through the positions in different areas - kindergarten you see a reduction you see one less section of kindergarten. We look at enrollments, looking to keep the class sizes under 20. Elementary grades staying where they are - have a 5th section of 1st grade, looking again at enrollment sizes. Middle school supports - going away - rolled into a core position with a civics teacher. Need for civics programming and largely successful. Art: no real change: computer/technology: we reclassified some positions - moved 2 tech positions from our stem positions, one was an add on at the elementary school. ELA - the reduction is change in staffing and classification of salary schedule; foreign language is the same; math has stayed the same increases due to steps in lane movement; music stayed the same; physical education a change in staffing; science was also a change in staffing; science and social studies, those 2 positions were funded through ESSER and brought them back into the budget. Those are positions we need moving forward; ELA is around staffing; Eliminated learning lab - the structure of that program was not working.

SPED admin went up - we brought in a position of special education chair into the budget. SPED specialists holding the line; pre-k change in staffing; SPED Instruction - typical increases; tuition- holding strong at \$275,00 a couple of out placements we share and a couple of potential outplaces.

Regional School Committee - legal fees, etc.

Instructional support: district office - realignment of staff and salaries

Budget Page 3: staff development - our contracted services around P.D; Library - 2 librarians have retired; School counselors - new hire - higher on the salary scale; Health Services - typical increases; technology - some of this is our software coming into the budget by ESSER and Tech. Director coming fully into the budget now; Athletics: the increase is Athletic Director; Student Activities: contractual increases; Custodial - increase; heating of buildings - actually able to reduce it; maintenance of grounds - natural increases in contracts; maintenance of buildings - natural increase with our contracts, everything is going up; General administration and fringe benefits - decreases - number of new employees didn't take health insurance, we ended up to the better in terms of our insurance. Transportation and Capital went down as well.

Mike Mucci: A & E - a lot of positions funded through ESSER - working hard to put those positions in the budget so when ESSER goes away we are right sized.

Mike Henault: During our A & E meeting, the committee did go line by line and asked questions about every line.

Erika: we are still covering non-SPED Paraprofessional positions from ESSER which equates to about \$170,000 which is actually less than the number that we use to charge to school choice in the past, we were funding those positions out of school choice, the past couple of years we have been preserving school choice, if we are not able to migrate all of those positions into the operating budget over the next year or so, we are going to have those funds in school choice that we get each year, that will be an offset to those positions, so we will be maintaining our current balance in school choice and only using those monies we get in as a wash to fund those positions. Those positions will be maintained despite being assigned to ESSER. Mike Henault: How long will that be sustainable?

Erika: for the foreseeable future.

The committee reviewed the remaining pages of the budget

Erin Milne: a big reduction in high school computer technology instructional supplies - is that where it got shifted to other departments, or are we cutting down? Erika: there isn't a teaching position - it is currently funded out of ESSER, the supplies aren't necessary for that position. A lot is covered in the technology budget.

Mike Henault: Can you speak to the reduction in stem teaching in grades 4 - 7? - Aaron: was realigned to computers

Erika: special education instruction - specifically the paras - making an effort to not fund as many paras out of the sped grant - migrated a few in the middle and high school which is why you will see some increases there - there are a significant number of 1:1 needs at the elementary school and trying to navigate having those come out of the grant and preserve money in the grant for those - they seem to arise very sporadically and we don't always have the funding in the operating budget to accommodate those positions, which is why you see some increases.

Erika: district office lease - basing that off information we have right now, on only 6 months of lease costs the number you see in district office lease is under the assumption we are going with the numbers we have and next year it will be encompassing 12 months instead of 6 months - that number will increase next year, however, the moving costs will go away and will not be too impactful. Mike Mucci: why isn't the rent for the full year? Erika: solid question? It would be a full 12 months, mind was on a calendar path with this can still be accommodated with what we budgeted in terms of moving.

Erin Milne: library aides - if a solution comes forward - is there money in ESSER to use for that? Erika: could be pulled from school choice if we were to continue with that

Mike Henault: is the money that we are making through the sharing agreement with the solar panels included in here? Erika: Yes, that is all part of projected expenditures, the reduced rate we are paying through those credits.

Mike Mucci: last year our increase was? Aaron: under 2%. Erika: 2% - \$396,000 was our increase.

Town Assessment: Erika: minimum is what is set by the state. This is where the majority of the increases for each town will lie Over minimum is the foundation which is everything but transportation and capital. What is left to be assessed is 1.8 million is based on enrollment, the splits have migrated they have been trending, Adams increasing, Cheshire decreasing, that continues to impact the over minimum for each Town. The net results of those 2 assessments is 4.5% for Adams and 1.6% for Cheshire. Overall our budget went for transportation and the impact on the towns shifted due to enrollment, the same way that the over minimum did Capital because we are removing the non MSBA Capital from the budget moving forward, the entire capital assessment is building project based, so that part is removed as the amount outside the levy limit the entire capital assessment so what you are left with your operating assessment which results in 3.6% to Adams .72% to Cheshire a total increase of assessment is 226,260 within their levy limit, now that we don't have the boilers our entire capital assessment is removed from that calculation from the town of assessments that are used towards setting their tax rate.

Mike Mucci: We invited finance committee members from both Towns to attend our meeting. None attended - Aaron has done a great job keeping the Towns involved in the budget process. Aaron: This budget allows us to use grants funds to enhance what we do to provide more support for students and teachers in the classrooms instead of just getting by.

Mike Mucci: This meeting is a budget hearing meeting only - no vote tonight, we will look to vote and ratify at the next meeting. Review the budget and ask questions at our next meeting. Nice job presenting this budget. It was a thorough process.

104033 **Public Comment or Question** - audience member: understanding the programming of optimal healing - 1 question was do they have the staff that they need to handle the requirements of our district? Keep saying they are overworked, stretched and hard to fit more students in? How do we have a 33-35 student number? Should it be 40-45 and we can't afford it? Aaron: They dedicated a certain amount of time to us, and we are using that to the maximum that we can, they started out with 3 therapists and added another therapist. The struggle we have is that we can never meet everyone's needs, we do the best we can, use the resources the best we can, we are going to take a look at expanding this. Through the mental health grant maybe we can add a school adjustment counselor within our staff to help fill those gaps. Finding staff is a struggle as well.

104034 **Chairman's - None**

104035 **Unfinished Business - None**

104036 **New Business - None**

104037 **Action Items - None**

104038 **For the Good of the Order**

Mike Henault: thanked the team for prioritizing curriculum and instruction into the budget.

Adam Emerson: Thanked the A & E Committee for making it easier for us to follow. Good luck to the girls team Wednesday night.

MOTION: On Motion of Adam Emerson and second by Mike Henault:

VOTED: To adjourn the meeting at 7:55 p.m. The vote was unanimous.

Respectfully Submitted,

Aaron Dean, Superintendent

Lisa Bresett, Recording Secretary