

MINUTES

Hoosac Valley Regional School Committee
School Committee Meeting - Budget Vote
Monday, March 27, 2023 - 6:30 p.m.
Cheshire Elementary School
191 Church Street, Cheshire, MA

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

ABSENT: Bethany DeMarco

OTHERS: Superintendent Aaron Dean, Tammie Shafer

I. Call to Order

Chairman Mike Mucci called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m.

II. Public Comment or Question - Tammie Shafer, ACTA president representing the teachers and paraprofessionals. Three concerns regarding the budget: 1. The significant amount of percent increases proposed in the budget for some positions, while it may be appropriate - wants to know the rationale behind some of the increases; 2. Approximately 266% increase in administrative staff when our district has the smallest population in its existence. Some of the concerns, a few years ago, we lost approximately 20 para positions, they have not been brought back, and our administrative numbers are the highest in the county, the only district behind our district is Pittsfield, over the past 10 years our district has lost about 500 students. 3. Nothing proposed in the budget for para and teacher increases as we are looking at negotiating contracts. Teachers' and paras were concerned about that.

Mike Mucci: 2nd highest administrators in the County, what is that referring to? Tammie gave a handout to the committee members from the DESE website. Look at the numbers, look at our district, administrator to teacher ratio, we have 24 administrators, which is 3.66 administrators per teacher, which is doubled than any other district. Aaron asked where the number 24 came from? Tammie: It came from the DESE site. Aaron, not sure what they consider administrators, we also have 110 teachers, these numbers from DESE are not accurate, in terms of outlining those percentages. Tammie also looked at the number of schools - Berkshire Hills is similar to us and they have about 13 administrators. Aaron: We have 9 building administrators: principals, AP of teaching and learning and a Deans and Director of Student Services.

Mike Henault: Guessing DESE is pulling licensure data, so you are seeing the actual number of licensed administrators, even if they are employed as a teacher, it would show up as administrators. Do you know where you pulled the data from? Tammie: not sure, there are so many reports on there.

Mike Mucci: We put a lot of effort into administrators, what is in ESSER, what is in the budget, your last bullet was concerns about increases in teacher's salary as we are going into negotiation and how it is reflected in the budget, certain percentage increases have been factored into the overall budget, but as we are still working through negotiations, Aaron feels comfortable with certain numbers they made, there is certainly not a zero percent increase in there, there are some numbers factored into that.

Erin Milne: para's come out a different fund? Aaron: We have them funded by grants and when ESSER goes away, they will be funded out of our revolving accounts, but the special education grant handles all our 1:1 currently.

Tammie: There has been a significant increase in the amount of administration in years past, that has been a concern based on less paras in the classrooms.

The committee thanked Tammie for bringing forward her concerns.

III. Approval of Minutes - March 13, 2023

MOTION: On Motion of John Duval and second by Regina Hill:

VOTED: to approve the March 13, 2023. The vote was unanimous

IV. Budget Vote - Aaron - went over the 5 year budget history (see attached). Wanted the committee to see all the documents that are going before the Town to have an understanding of what is being put out there. Our revenue from the state, this year we finally got the money that our students deserve with that increase, we received \$800,000 in revenue, which allowed us to keep the Towns a little flatter in terms of what we are asking for. Going to 3% in Adams allows us to use less E & D money moving forward, so we can get ourselves closer to a true budget every year and not have to worry about carrying money over from the previous year's budget to make sure we can make the numbers work. Reimbursement for transportation has gone down because our costs have gone down - capital revenue has gone down - the revenue pages - there are very clear changes; expenditures: we increased our money for personnel and decreased operational costs - a good sign of being responsible for our budget. Looking closely at all our operational costs and making those adjustments, to help us invest the money where it needs to be, with our staff and with our resources for our staff. Special education - we have a target we have to meet for maintenance of effort every year, you will see those increases regardless, increase in administration, there are some things we have to address with processes and things we had to do to build support for staff in order to do things better and more efficiently. As we get ready for our tiered focus monitoring, the next cycle is going to be on timelines, implementation of services, paperwork, those are areas we found we were falling down and we need to build in supports, making sure timelines are met - would like to hire more paras - we have shortages in staff. We have applied for a significant pre-k expansion grant - if we get that, it would be a game changer for our early childhood programs. We are not grasping for positions, we are seeing needs, needing to develop curriculum, look at data, you need positions such as AP of teaching and learning, these are our go to people, helping through a lot of issues, these are key positions in moving the district forward. Staff and instructional support - those are where increases are, as you get into operations, our building operations are relatively flat but also able to do a lot with ESSER funds, a lot of work done at the elementary school, also addressing at the middle/high school in particular controls, roof leaks, doing our best. Our building operations operational pieces, that is where we are able to make the reductions and keep things level. We negotiated our transportation and reduced our bus fleet. Dufour has been a great partner.

Mike Mucci: look at the data over 5 years - curriculum - it is something that we never had a budget for - we went from 0 to 0 to 0 to now \$150,00 how is that funded? Where was that accounted for before? Aaron: We did have grants that drove some of that work, probably didn't do it adequately. The coordinator does so much work in our district - making sure everything is aligned, and makes sure we are making well informed decisions. Mike Mucci: Middle school support? Put certain funds in there, and now we don't, Where did that money go? Aaron: that position moved to civics. We still have intervention and WIN blocks. Also addressed the gap we have in civics. We needed to develop that curriculum and that person we put in that position has done a lot of work. We have courses that are really aligned with social studies standards at all of the grade levels. Mike Mucci: High school learning lab? - Aaron: that position was eliminated, it wasn't working within the setting, still looking to recreate that. Colleen Byrd: every year we try something different with the learning lab, students out there where the traditional setting isn't working for them, or some students were taking some advances classes to try and get ahead, that was the vision for it, it just hasn't really come together - this year, we had teachers who did not have caseloads of 5 classes, to have those teachers give the students a better opportunity, having a regular ed teacher there while they were doing math, same thing with science and ELA and history are being taught by our foreign language teacher - looking at project based learning, is really the direction we should be moving to. Every year, trying to figure out how to get the most for our students in education, knowing they have different needs.

Adam Emerson: when you bring the budget to the towns, they see the big swings, if there was a summary page, geographical changes, just a quick explanation - there could be a lot less questions about the budget - institutionalizing things that were typically grant funded, salary and positions, that were typically grant funded that are now put into the budget to make them normal, they are seeing these huge increases, thinking that we either have new positions or higher salaries. A quick summary when you meet with the Towns and at the Town meeting - it would go a long way, and calm those questions. Erika: has a "cheat sheet" which is for us, and goes department by department, increases and why. We can give that to them, this is for every single line, we have an explanation.

Aaron: The main document - we did adjust the numbers regarding the lease. Erika: Our bottom line has not changed, our assessments are not changing- did add a lease line, it is under district administration, page 7, district office lease and moving costs. Increased the district office lease to reflect our anticipated costs for the proposed space, in order to do that brought moving costs down to 10 and pulled from the regional school committee, legal services, brought that down to more of an actual cost. Also pulled a little more from retiree insurance based on the way the numbers are trending, any increase from the office lease came from those funds.

Regina Hill: Would this budget reflect a better realignment of personnel and services along with our incorporation of previously grant funded positions and services into the budget, so it's more representative of what our actual costs are versus previous years? Aaron: That has been our goal to make the core the core. Regina: The goal has been that every year. We have not been able to do that in previous years.

Mike Henault: went through the budget thoroughly, what stood out, other than operationalizing those grant funding positions it is a true shift towards supporting instruction and curriculum in a way that we always known we needed and never been able to do- it sends a good message that we are supporting our students with high quality curriculum materials and also supporting the P.D. of building instructional practices that can move the district forward, given where our MCAS scores are at, it is important that you were able to capture that in our budget - we are on our way there.

Mike Henault: clarifying questions - do you have a direct communication with ACTA to address the questions Tammie brought up tonight? So that they can hear the answers? A little concerned, went through the numbers again, breakdown is that we have 9 building administrators and 4 district administrators? Aaron: close to that. Mike: that is a really shallow district level administration, even across the county, no Assistant Superintendent, etc. - Kristen's job has 3 hats that would be 3 positions in the district, even of this size, we are not in any way administratively top heavy - this number 24, if on DESE somewhere, has to be taken care of. This is not representative of the work that you are doing, taking a lot of steps keeping administrative costs fairly low considering the task of essentially turning around the district, a rural district with a lot of fiscal difficulties. It is important to clear up. It is not a 266% increase in administrative staff and we are far from being the highest in the county. Aaron: We started the process to clear this up, nothing is simple with data reporting.

Mike Mucci asked the committee if they had any other questions? None, moving to the approve the school committee orders:

School Committee Order SC2302 - FY2024 Budget:

Submitted herein for your approval is the FY2024 School Committee Budget totaling \$21,385,195. The FY2024 Budget consists of:

Foundation Budget:	\$19,554,025
Transportation Budget:	\$ 946,020
Capital Budget	<u>\$ 885,150</u>
Total:	\$21,385,195

VOTED: To approve S.C. Order SC2302. The vote was unanimous.

School Committee Order SC2303 - FY2024 Assessment Town of Adams:

Submitted herein for your approval is the FY2024 Assessment to the Town of Adams for its portion of the Adopted FY2024 School Committee Budget in accordance with the Hoosac Valley Regional School District Agreement. The Assessment is as follows:

Foundation Budget:	\$ 5,375,874
Transportation Budget:	\$ 468,030
Capital Budget	<u>\$ 683,051</u>
Total:	\$ 6,526,955

VOTED: To approve S.C. Order SC2303. The vote was unanimous.

School Committee Order SC2304 - FY2024 Assessment Town of Cheshire:

Submitted herein for your approval is the FY2024 Assessment to the Town of Cheshire for its portion of the Adopted FY2024 School Committee Budget in accordance with the Hoosac Valley Regional School District Agreement. The Assessment is as follows:

Foundation Budget:	\$ 2,625,694
Transportation Budget:	\$ 133,032
Capital Budget	<u>\$ 187,736</u>
Total:	\$ 2,948,462

VOTED: To approve S.C. Order SC2304. The vote was unanimous.

School Committee Order SC2305 - Appropriation from Certified E & D:

Submitted herein for your approval is a request to appropriate \$75,000 from E & D as certified by the Department of Revenue for the purpose of reducing the FY2024 Foundation Budget assessments to the member towns.

Be it hereby ordered that the \$75,000 be appropriated from certified E & D for the purpose of reducing the FY2024 Foundation Budget assessments to the members Towns of Adams and Cheshire

VOTED: To approve S.C. Order SC2305. The vote was unanimous.

District Office Space: Aaron: looked at space in North Adams, the space fit us really well. 2 issues, we are not in Adams or Cheshire, the other issue was the mass broadband does not run through there and there was no timeline of when they could get it, and it could be potentially costly - Landlord John Duquette wanted to do anything to help us, even to bear the expense of the internet, if it was in Adams, it would have been an easy decision. The other space was from Fox Point Partners, the Jones Block, in downtown Adams. Great space, 3 defined office areas. This is the space Aaron is recommending we go forward with. \$4,500/month - Identical in terms of price in both areas. See attached lease agreement. Mike Mucci asked about enough space for confidential information to be stored? Aaron: we will be scanning some documents to reduce the need for file cabinets, but we do have space. Mike Mucci: the use of the visitor center on the first floor is available as is the library for meetings, etc. 2 town resource buildings to use to help with the gap for meeting space.

MOTION: On Motion of Regina Hill and second by John Duval:

Voted: to enter into the lease for the Jones Building, Park Street, Adams. The vote was unanimous.

V. Approval of Student Opportunity Act – Aaron: outlines the core pieces of our original SOP had to file an amended plan, bringing it forward for approval (see attached plan) It is no different than our visions and what we are talking about, making sure we have high quality instructional practices in the classrooms; outlines the P.D. with companies that we are contracting. Looking for approval of this plan.

MOTION: On Motion of Erin Milne and second by Adam Emerson:

VOTED: to approve the Student Opportunity Act as amended. The vote was unanimous.

VI. Out of State Travel - Connecticut - Portrait of a Graduate - Kristen Palatt - Hoosac has joined the Portrait of a Graduate work that is happening across the county. It has afforded us many opportunities, this is another opportunity, this would be for 2 chaperones and 2 students who have been working with the Portrait of the Graduate team since the beginning, will take place on Tuesday April 4th through Wednesday, April 5th. During that time, the students would get the chance to do a high school visit of a Portrait of a Graduate transformed high school to collaborate with other students who have been part of the portrait of a graduate work throughout the northeast to collaborate on the high school experience from the student's perspective and share ideas, problem solve, and bring that information back to our high school. No costs associated with this. Adam: would love to have the students share their experience with the committee.

MOTION: On Motion of Adam Emerson and second by Regina Hill:

VOTED: to approve the Portrait of a Graduate field trip. The vote was unanimous.

MOTION: On Motion of John Duval and second by Mike Henault.

VOTED: to adjourn the meeting at 7:37. The vote was unanimous.

Respectfully Submitted,

Aaron Dean, Superintendent

Lisa Bresett, Recording Secretary