

MINUTES



**Addison Central School District
ACSD Board
Special Board Meeting
Thursday, January 25, 2024, 7:00 pm - 9:00 pm
208 Charles Avenue, Middlebury VT**

ACSD District Vision and Mission

OUR VISION

Our vision is for all ACSD students to reach their full learning potential, have a sense of belonging in our schools, and enrich our community and the communities where they live in the future.

OUR MISSION

Our mission is to provide high-quality, equitable, and varied learning environments that inspire a passion for learning and growth among our students.

In-Person Attendance

Barbara Wilson; Brian Bauer; Ellen Whelan-Wuest; James Malcolm; Jamie McCallum; Jason Chance; Joanna Doria; Mary Heather Noble; Steve Orzech; Suzanne Buck

Remote Attendance

Lindsey Hescocock

Not In Attendance

Ellie Romp; Tricia Allen

A. Call to Order Upon Reaching A Quorum

Barb Wilson

Meeting called to order at 7:01 p.m.

1. Introductions - Board Members, Administrators, and Staff

5 min

Others present: ACSD Interim Superintendent Tim Williams, ACSD Director of Finance and Operations Matt Corrente, and ACSD Clerk Linda Barrett.

2. Public Comment on Agenda Items

10 min

No public comment

B. Report of the Superintendent

1. Action: Adopt FY25 ACSD Budget

Matthew Corrente 30 min

Matt Corrente opened the discussion. The budget figures from his presentation on Monday, January 22, 2024 have not changed -- they made minor edits to the FY25 budget book, and it is ready for Board action. He invited questions from the Board.

Barb Wilson took a motion to approve the FY25 budget book to allow for Board discussion.

Board comments prior to the vote:

James Malcolm said that he had watched the legislative hearing on the impacts of Act 127 on Vermont school districts. Everyone is upset about the impacts, and nobody knows how to get out from under the changes imposed by its redistributed funding. There is no perfect place to be, but we must try to do what is best for our students and taxpayers. We have stayed under the spending threshold to avoid unbearable tax consequences. We have documented what we've done and the budget should be able to withstand the scrutiny of the state. He supports it.

Suzanne Buck expressed continued discomfort with how close our budget is to the spending increase threshold, but after listening to the legislative hearing, she feels that ACS D is in a better place than many other districts. Everyone's budgets are impacted by the "trough" that has been created by the phasing in of Act 127, but we've done the best we can.

Joanna Doria said that she felt good about the FY25 Budget on Monday's Board meeting, but she did have some specific questions about how the yield influences the final numbers. Matt Current explained that the yield is a variable that doesn't become fixed until all the budgets in the state are approved and set -- because of the 5% tax rate cap, the yield is causing those districts that Act 127 was intended to help to experience tax increases of their own (meaning they take on the burden of funding other districts' spending beyond their tax cap). This is one of the unintended consequences of the method used to phase in the transition. Joanna also had questions about the funding for the Mary Hogan HVAC project -- Matt explained that ESSER funds 2/3 of the project (which must be spent by September 2024), and that the remaining 1/3 cost is divided between already allocated FY24 funds and requested FY25 funds.

Steve Orzech made a statement about his concerns re: the FY25 budget. He has been struggling with the process, trying to ensure that ACS stay below the 10% increase in spending threshold. And even with the tax rate cap, we are still taking on additional expenses that will create a fiscal cliff a few years down the road. He said that he can't believe we are still not talking about consolidation as a solution -- he has tried to convince people that this is a necessary part of the solution. He cannot in good conscience support this budget.

Barb Wilson responded to Steve's comment, stating that her understanding was that the FY25 budget was not intended to impose major changes, because we are welcoming new leadership. Those decisions would very hard to make under an interim superintendent, so the expectation was that we would wait to tackle the issue under Dr. Baker is in place. Barb stated that she does not personally feel she is ignoring any issues, and that the Board will need to work with Dr. Baker on implementing the Strategic Plan and addressing the next budget together.

Mary Heather Noble also responded. She agrees with Steve Orzech in that consolidation is a necessary part of the solution to achieve long term sustainability. The current budget does imply that the Board values town schools above all else. However, she also agrees with Barb Wilson in that this is not the right time to impose those changes -- doing so right before welcoming a new Superintendent does not set them up for success. She supports the FY25 budget because it strikes a balance of maintaining stability and investing in the future leadership, continuing support for interventions and pandemic-relief programming that is still needed, while keeping the opening increases below the threshold imposed by Act 127. She emphasized the Board's need to work on FY26 planning right away, and does not think this budget structure should continue in the future, but feels that FY25 budget sets the District up

for success fun problem-solving in the 2024-25 year.

Suzanne echoed Mary Heather's point about consolidation, noting that some districts testifying in the legislative hearings also requested the state to consider regional schools as a model for educating students.

Joanna Doria expressed her support for FY25 -- it is a responsible budget and maintains many of the ESSER-funded intervention positions. She also cautioned against looking at closing schools as a silver bullet. It is a complicated issue that may introduce other problems.

James Malcolm emphasized the financial pressures facing districts in the future -- the problem is that even maintaining the same educational product costs the community significantly more. He acknowledged the complexity of the issue, noting valid points in both Steve and Joann's statements.

Matt Corrente also mentioned the point that many in the education sector have made about the likelihood that ever-increasing taxes drives families away and contributes to the declining enrollment... which then causes districts to lose more money and increase local taxes to support local schools.

Barb Wilson then called the vote. 11 Ayes, 1 Nay. The Fy25 Budget Book is approved.

Motion to approve the ACSD FY25 Budget Book as presented in the meeting materials, which would set the FY25 budget at \$50,604,080, which represents a 6.5% increase in Total Spending and is the amount the ACSD school board has determined to be necessary for the ensuing fiscal year.

Move: Jason Chance Second: James Malcolm Status: Passed

2. Action: Adopt School District Warnings Tim Williams 5 min

Tim Williams shared the language for the school district warnings. The Annual Meeting warning had a slight change to include the appointment of both a new ACSD Board Clerk and new at-large ACSD-appointed member of the PAHCC Board (since Linda Barrett and Nick Causton will no longer serve those respective roles).

Suzanne Buck made a motion to approve the warning for the February 27, 2024 ACSD Annual Meeting. Jason Chance seconded. There was no Board discussion. Barb Wilson called the vote and all members voted unanimously to approve the warning.

Suzanne Buck made a motion to approve the second warning for the Australian Ballot on March 5, 2024. Ellen Whelan-Wuest seconded. There was no further Board discussion. Barb Wilson called the vote and all members voted unanimously to approve the warning.

C. Report of the Board Barb Wilson

1. Budget Communication Plan Mary Heather Noble 10 min

Mary Heather Noble updated the full Board on the FY25 budget communications plan that the Communication & Engagement Committee has developed:

- Emily Blistein has created a Budget page on the ACSD website, which will hold the budget book and all other voter education resources.

- The Finance and C&E Committees have created a FAQs sheet which will also be posted on the budget page. The C&E Committee will work with MCTV to create a mini-interview to review the FAQs so there is an audio/visual medium for voters to access.

- The Winter Board Update will go out with a link to the budget page, a link to a google form to submit budget questions, information about a virtual Q&A session on Feb 15th, and the information about the Feb 27th Annual Meeting.

- Barb Wilson's Statement from the Chair from the budget book will be slightly modified and sent as an op-ed in the Addison Independent. It will include links to the budget page, and will also be posted on FPF.

- The C&E Committee will host the virtual Q&A session on Feb 15th at 7:00 p.m. with some high-level budget details extracted from Matt's existing presentation and then open it to questions. This will be recorded and posted on the budget page.

- The C&E Committee is also planning to have Board Tables set up at a few existing ACSD school events to provide voter education materials and Board member interaction where families are already scheduled to come. Mary Heather will send a sign-up sheet to Board members to staff the tables. The dates/event:

- Feb 1, 6:30-8:30 p.m., MUHS 8th Grade Information Night for incoming freshman

- Feb 6, 6:00-8:00 p.m., MUMS Mardi Gras Celebration

- Feb 8, 5:45-7:00 p.m., Mary Hogan Literacy Night

- Feb 8, 6:30-8:00 p.m., MUHS DP Music Recital

- Feb 12, 6:00-7:30 p.m., Rural Elementary Band & Choir Concert @ Salisbury School

- Feb 13, time TBA, MUMS Band & Choir Concert @ MUHS Auditorium

There was some discussion about needing to emphasize the difference between the tax rate that the Board is able to influence and the CLA that is not determined by the Board. Steve Orzech suggested mapping out a plan like this for FY26, because this will be important for next year's budget planning efforts as well.

D. Public Comment - Any topic

10 min

No public comment.

E. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 7:52 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Heather Noble
Board Clerk

Motion to adjourn.

Move: Suzanne Buck Second: Joanna Doria Status: Passed

Total Meeting Time: 1h 10m

***Public Comment Guidelines:**

Public comments are encouraged and welcome at each regular board meeting during the period designated for public comment. Comments are limited to three minutes per person. Citizens will be called to make their statement by the board chair. Public comments regarding personnel, students or legal matters will not be heard by the Board.