

MINUTES



**Addison Central School District
ACSD Board
Board Meeting
Monday, January 22, 2024, 6:30 pm - 8:30 pm
208 Charles Avenue, Middlebury VT & Virtual Connection**

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; Ellie Romp; James Malcolm; Jamie McCallum; Jason Chance; Joanna Doria; Mary Heather Noble; Steve Orzech; Suzanne Buck; Tricia Allen

Remote Attendance

Lindsey Hescock

A. Call to Order Upon Reaching A Quorum

Meeting called to order at 6:30 p.m.

1. Introductions - Board Members, Administrators and Staff 5 min

ACSD Staff present: Tim Williams, Interim Superintendent; Nicole Carter, Assistant Superintendent and Director of Equity & Student Services (remote); Matt Corrente, Director of Finance & Operations; Bruce Macintyre, Director of Facilities; Will Hatch, Director of Technology

Note: Board member Lindsey Hescock first participated remotely and then joined in person.

2. Public Comment on Agenda Items 10 min

No public comment.

B. Recommendation to Approve Minutes of 1/8/2024 5 min

Motion to approve the minutes of the January 8, 2024 meeting.

Move: Jason Chance Second: Suzanne Buck Status: Passed

C. Approve ACSD Bills James Malcolm 5 min

James Malcolm presented the ACSD Bills that were read by himself and Jason Chance on January 15, 2024.

General Fund: \$1,197,084.64 (Note: ~\$530K of this is healthcare and dental; ~\$170K is for teacher retirement payments; and \$150K is for student transportation).

Payroll: \$941,130.63

Motion to approve payment of the ACSD Bills as presented.

Move: James Malcolm Second: Jason Chance Status: Passed

D. Report of the Student Representative

Eddie Fallis 5 min
Sophia Lawton

Neither Eddie Fallis nor Sophia Lawton were present, so this agenda item was skipped.

E. Report of the Superintendent

Tim Williams

Tim Williams noted the latest Superintendent Update in the meeting materials, and introduced Bruce Macintyre to present the bids for the Mary Hogan HVAC upgrade project.

Steve Orzech did ask Tim Williams about the Free & Reduced Lunch figures presented in the Superintendent's Report, specifically about the threshold required for a school to qualify for school-wide Title I funding. The threshold for a school to receive Title I designation is for 40% or more of its enrolled students to qualify for free & reduced lunch. Tim noted that they have sought a waiver for those schools that have recently qualified as Title I in the past but may have just barely met the requirements for FY25 (Bridport and Salisbury). Nicole Carter reported that Shoreham and MUMS received targeted funding due to the average number of students living in poverty.

There was some discussion & concern about the State's use of self-reported free & reduced lunch data for Title I funding designation, especially since families are no longer incentivized to complete the forms for their children. There was also concern about that some families with multiple children in different ACSD schools may not be completing the forms for all of their children, resulting in inaccurate counts. Matt Corrente said that the State is aware of this problem and is investigating other ways to collect surrogate data to estimate children living in poverty.

1. Action to approve Mary Hogan Contractor Bid Board Memo

5 min

Bruce Macintyre reminded the Board about the pre-approved contractors for the bidding process. ACSD received two bids: from Bread Loaf Corporation and Farrington Construction. He opened the bids and presented the numbers as follows:

Farrington Construction: Base Bid of \$1,270,832.00 and \$77,862.00 for alternate flooring project. Total bid at \$1,348,694.00.

Bread Loaf Corporation: Base Bid of \$1,119,000.00 and \$108,000.00 for alternate flooring project. Total bid at \$1,227,000.00.

Bruce noted Bread Loaf Corporation as the lowest bidder to receive the project.

Matt Corrente explained that the project straddles FY24 and FY25 -- \$800,000 ESSER money earmarked for the project will be spent by September 2024; half of the difference is in FY24 budget, the other half in the FY25 budget.

Motion to award the Mary Hogan Elementary School ESSER capital improvement project to the apparent low bidder, Breadloaf Corporation, based on the alternates chosen contingent upon final review of all the bids and authorize Superintendent Williams to execute a contract with the low bidder associated with this work.

Move: Steve Orzech Second: James Malcolm Status: Passed

2. Action: Approve Faculty/Staff Appointments/Resignations 5 min

Dr. Williams presented the list of ACSD Staff appointments, resignations, and requests for leave.

The positions are existing vacancies to be filled and the request for leave is an unpaid leave. There will be a substitute nurse to cover the resignation from the nurse position.

Motion to approve the following appointments and resignations as presented in the meeting materials:

- a. Appoint Matthew Alford as a Paraprofessional, 1.0 FTE, Step 1
- b. Appoint Stacey Thomann as Payroll Coordinator, 1.00 FTE, Non-Union no step placement
- c. Approve Resignation of Arlene Mathewson, MUHS Nurse, effective 1/16/2024
- d. Approve Resignation of Kate Wolff, ELL teacher, effective 6/30/2024

Move: Suzanne Buck Second: Steve Orzech Status: Passed

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- b. Appoint Stacey Thomann as Payroll Coordinator, 1.00 FTE, Non-Union no step placement
- c. Approve Resignation of Arlene Mathewson, MUHS Nurse, effective 1/16/2024
- d. Approve Resignation of Kate Wolff, ELL teacher, effective 6/30/2024
- e. Approve leave of absence request for Ben Long for the 2024-25 SY

3. Presentation: ACSD FY25 Budget Matthew Corrente 60 min

Matt Corrente provided the most recent FY25 budget figures in his final budget presentation, which begins at 27 minutes into the meeting recording (available at <https://www.acsdvt.org/school-board/board-meetings>).

Recap/Major points:

- Act 127 is the biggest driver for the increased budget. The new student weighting formula significantly decreases the amount of funding we get from the State with our enrollment, which diminishes the tax capacity. Bottom line: The same spending rate will still increase our district's taxes. Or put another way, it would take \$4.5 million in cuts to maintain our current tax rate.

- The Finance Committee recommends a 9.9% increase in spending to maintain the staffing and programs to deliver the same level of education product while remaining before the 10% increase in spending threshold imposed by Act 127.

- The roadmap for the budget to Town Meeting day:

- 1/26 is the deadline for warning the ACSD Annual Meeting
- 2/2 is the deadline to warn the budget for Town Meeting Day

- 2/27 ACSD Annual Meeting and budget presentation
- 3/5 Town Meeting Day

- The proposed FY25 budget is a bridge to continue providing ACSD students with post-pandemic support, provide stability in staffing and services for a smooth transitions to a new superintendent, and avoid the enormous tax rate impact of Act 127 (ie. takes advantage of the 5-year phase-in opportunity to ease the transition to the new tax rate caused by Act 127).

Matt Corrente continued through the presentation in two parts: 1) General Financial Section with year-to-year summary and tax rates; and 2) Detailed Financial Section with cost center analysis and enrollment.

Board Comments and Questions:

- Jamie McCallum asked about the education grants, and whether there are any other additional grant funding sources that ACSD should be seeking. Matt explained the distinction between project-based competitive grants and data-based qualifying grants (such as Title I, block grants, etc.).

- Joanna Doria asked about the merger grant. Matt explained that ACSD continues to receive \$350,000 for the merger grant since it doesn't qualify for the small school weight.

- Suzanne Buck asked about the risk of exceeding a 10% increase in spending, given the incomplete negotiations with teacher and staff unions, and still-to-be-determined salary increases. Matt acknowledged this as a possibility, but also noted that having an approved budget does also put a limitation on what the Board can negotiate based on what the taxpayers support. If the associations demand higher, it could turn into an unfunded mandate. Given the impact of Act 127 on the tax rate, the District will need to calibrate its spending over the next 5 years and not continue to increase.

- Steve Orzech noted the discussion in the Finance Committee about the 3 choices the Board faces: if the Board exceeds 10% spending increase, it risks losing the 5% tax rate cap and costing the taxpayer an unacceptable rise in property taxes. If the Board stays just below the 10% spending increase, it is creating a ~5% cliff five years from now. If the Board starts making cuts to this FY25 budget, it would be in better shape for easing into the impact from Act 127. But that would be very challenging to do because those kind of cuts are really hard.

- Ellen Whelan-Wuest acknowledged the difficult choices and noted that there was not 100% agreement on the Finance Committee about it. But this FY25 is the hardest year because of the loss of ESSER funds on top of the impacts of Act 127. Many on the committee felt it would be best to keep spending just enough below the threshold to allow for stability and continuity of recovery efforts while still qualifying for the 5% tax cap. Then next year the difficult conversations around real budget cuts can begin.

- Joanna Doria asked about the recent letter from the Legislature's Ways and Means Committee and its expressed intent to basically audit school districts for their spending decisions. Is there anything in our FY25 budget that we should be really nervous about? Matt explained that the FY25 budget preserves most of the ESSER funded positions because the data demonstrates the need. This includes preserving interventionists and some additional classroom teachers, now to be funded by the general fund. The ESSER positions we allowed to sunset include the MUMS behavioral position, the Dean of Climate and Culture, and the HHB Coordinator. The ELL coordinator is also being reconfigured into a contracted position. Joanna asked about the process of deciding which ESSER positions to keep.

Tim Williams answered that they are keeping the ones with the closest student contact and most direct impact on students. He also noted that the State is concerned about Districts padding their budgets up to 10% increases with one-time construction projects (which doesn't meet the intent of the law) to take advantage of the 5% tax cap. ACSD is not squeezing extra expenses into the budget during this grace period, and should withstand scrutiny.

- Mary Heather Noble asked about the loss of 1.0 FTE teacher from Shoreham, even though it has a higher or equal enrollment to other rural schools that are not losing staff. Matt brought up the table of student enrollment at each school and where blended classrooms will be used – Shoreham will be blending a classroom due to lower numbers in consecutive grades.

- Steve Orzech again pointed out the disproportionate amount of money being spent in the rural schools verses Mary Hogan, especially when taking into account that student services are not included in the cost center summaries. He implied the inequality is worse when student service costs are factored in. Matt explained the reasoning behind separating those figures. Cost center expenses should be grounded in enrollment. Student service costs are grounded in additional need beyond EQS.

- Lindsey Hescok also inquired about the disproportionate amount of spending per pupil between several schools, even comparing between different rural schools. Matt and Ellen explained that some of that is due to the different building expenses, different enrollment numbers at each of these schools, as well as the differences in health care plans for many of the staff members at the different places. One staff person needing a family plan can have a significant impact on the cost/pupil at a small school. Lindsay noted the challenges with these figures and warned that many people will focus on them when considering the budget.

- Mary Heather expressed appreciation for Lindsey's question about the distribution of resources across the district, but also acknowledged that this is a bridge budget year to transition to preserve stability for a new leader. This is not the year to pull apart the configuration, but moving forward the focus should be on structuring a budget to deliver equitable instruction, resources, and opportunities to all students, and not just focusing on dollars spent/student. She stated that the value system illustrated in the current budget is that ACSD values location/geography over all else. But budget development in FY26 and beyond should to involve a community-wide conversation about this, and whether it is fair/sustainable.

- Barb Wilson noted the importance of focusing on the FTE's at each location (as opposed to \$ spent), and whether the proportion of FTE's is reasonable for the enrollment at each location. She said that other District budget books do not break things down to a school-by-school basis because it's not necessarily accurate when you consider the shared costs of shared services. Suzanne Buck agreed that it is very difficult to accurately portray a per-school cost for this very reason. There was some discussion about how to present the information that both provides an accurate and transparent picture of what being is spent where. Matt agreed that it would be good for the Board to set its expectations for the level of detail in future budget books. Joanna Doria emphasized the importance of reviewing each cost center to fully understand the larger picture.

4. Action: Approve the transfer of \$2,033,842 from FY23 General Fund to the Capital Reserves 5 min

Matt Corrente presented a memo with the recommendation to transfer FY23 general fund balance of \$2,033,842 to the capital reserve fund so the money is available to address one-time emergent needs and/or be used for investment in facilities improvement projects.

Motion to approve the transfer of \$2,033,842 from the FY23 General Fund to the Capital Reserve Fund.

Move: Suzanne Buck Second: James Malcolm Status: Passed

5. Review: District Warnings

5 min

Matt Corrente presented the draft ballot warnings for the Annual Meeting and the Australian Ballot for Town Meeting Day. The Board should review and notify him of any corrections ASAP. This will be voted on at the Special Board Meeting on January 25, 2024.

James Malcom noted that the budget number in this year's warning is the TOTAL educational budget, and not just the general fund (which is what was warned last year). The group discussed the difference between the two years -- in FY24, many districts only warned the general fund because they felt the ESSER money made the budgets look large (and could confuse voters about how much money needed to be locally supported). The usual accepted practice is to warn the total budget, so ACSD and other districts are returning to that. It is just important for Board members to understand in case anyone questions the difference between what was warned in FY24 and FY25.

F. Report of the Chair

Barb Wilson 5 min

Barb Wilson provided a brief update. PAHCC has an at large position that is designated by the ACSD Board. Nick Causton has been the designee for a long time but has decided to step down from the PAHCC Board. ACSD needs to appoint another at-large community member. Suzanne Buck explained that the ACSD Board needs to announce the vacancy and ask interested people to submit a letter of interest for the Board's review. The Board will then interview interested candidates and appoint one person.

Barb Wilson also mentioned Dr. Wendy Baker's upcoming visit on Tuesday, January 23rd. They will be visiting Ripton, Salisbury, and MUHS. Ellen Whelan-Wuest, Joanna Doria, and Steve Orzech are all helping.

G. Report of the Board

10 min

1. Communications & Engagement

Mary Heather Noble

Mary Heather Noble provided a brief overview of the C&E Committee's recent work: The focus is on voter education materials and outreach for FY25 budget. She noted the draft Board Update that has already been circulated to Board members -- that will go out soon. They are working to create a FY25 Budget page on the District website, where all the budget information will reside. The committee is creating a 1 page fact sheet that can be posted on the page, as well as on Front Porch Forum and in the Addison Independent. The Finance Committee is finalizing content for the FAQs sheet, which will then be designed/formatted by the C&E Committee and posted. The C&E Committee would like to engage MCTV and the Board's student reps to have a few Q&A recordings to post on the website. And finally, they are hoping to do a recorded webinar in mid-Feb to give people an opportunity to ask questions in real time, and then post the recording on the District website.

2. Negotiations

Steve Orzech

No specific update given due to lack of time.

3. Facilities

Jason Chance

Jason Chance reported that the Facilities Committee recently heard Bruce MacIntire's mid-year report on the maintenance of ACSD facilities -- he would like the full Board to hear this and is asking to have this put on a future agenda.

4. Finance

James Malcolm

Finance Committee work already covered with budget presentation.

5. Policy

Suzanne Buck

Suzanne Buck reported that the Policy Committee is working on Policy C9, a required policy which must be in place by the end of the year. Laura Nugent is heading a committee to assist with that work.

The Committee is also working on Policy E20, which addresses community use of school facilities. This has received significant attention, given the recent event hosted at Vergennes High School. There is also a policy related to school budgets that Suzanne wanted to wait to introduce until after the FY25 budget work is done.

6. Addison Central SEPAC Update

Joanna Doria
Suzanne Buck

Suzanne Buck reported that the SEPAC Board met recently and added an education liaison. They plan to meet every 3rd Wednesday of the month, and plan to offer some activities to celebrate neurodiversity week in March.

7. Middlebury Community Television Update

Barb Wilson

MCTV Board has not met -- no update provided.

8. Parks and Recreation Update

Lindsey Hescock

Lindsey Hescock read a letter from Scott Bourne of the Middlebury Parks and Recreation Department. The Board has not yet met, but Scott provided some information about recent work in the Department. Parks and Rec is fully staffed and currently busy offering basketball and gymnastics to the community. They have hired a new maintenance person who is catching up on neglected projects. After the winter season, Parks and Rec is planning for summer. They have many vacancies to fill for camp counselors and lifeguards. They also hope to invest in some upgrades for the town pool and pool house.

9. Patricia A. Hannaford Career Center

Steve Orzech
Tricia Allen

No update provided due to lack of time.

H. Public Comment - Any Topic

10 min

No public comment.

I. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 9:28 p.m.

Motion to adjourn.

Move: Suzanne Buck Second: Jamie McCallum Status: Passed

Total Meeting Time: 2h 15m

*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.