

**GROTON BOARD OF EDUCATION
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
FEBRUARY 12, 2024 @ 6:00 P.M.
CENTRAL OFFICE, ROOM 11/HYBRID**

Members Present: Jay Weitlauf-Chairperson, Andrea Ackerman (remote), Dean Antipas, Adrian Johnson, Robert Meade (remote), Matthew Shulman, Ian Thomas, Jennifer White

Members Absent: Beverly Washington

Also Present: Susan Austin, Philip Piazza, David Fleig, Sam Kilpatrick, Denise Doolittle, Laurie LePine, John Burt

Town Council Present: Rachael Franco-Mayor, Portia Bordelon, Bruce Jones, Juliette Parker, Jill Rusk, Adam Puccino, Roscoe Merritt (arrived at 6:58 p.m.)

Town Council Absent: Dan Gaiewski, David McBride

RTM Education Committee Present: Michael Whitney-Chairperson, Andrew Parrella (remote), Christy McElroy

RTM Education Committee Absent: Alexis Dudden, Katrina Fitzgerald, Marie Robertson

I. CALL TO ORDER

- Board of Education Chairperson Jay Weitlauf called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.
- Town Council Mayor Rachael Franco called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. and stated that the three chairpersons discussed and agreed that there will be 5-minute speaking intervals, one time per person. Counselor Rusk agreed to be the timer.
- RTM Education Committee Chairperson Michael Whitney called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

II. BUDGET WORK SESSION

- Financial Challenges - Mr. Fleig gave an overview of the following:
 - FY24 Estimated Costs for Property
 - FY24 Estimated Costs for Unplanned Events
 - FY25 Budget – Early Observations: Mr. Fleig noted that no reserve can be used above the corridor regarding insurance
 - Historical Healthcare Costs
 - FY25 Proposed Budget without healthcare and with healthcare
 - Expenditure per Pupil
 - 2022-2023 Net Expenditures Per Pupil – as compared to Local Districts
 - 2022-2023 Net Expenditures Per Pupil – as compared to DRG
 - Mission Statement
 - Superintendent Austin gave an overview of Program Highlights

Questions Asked:

- Counselor Jones discussed relating the budget numbers to the average household.
- Counselor Parker inquired about ARP ESSER funds being used for staff. She also discussed grants that can be used for the HVAC systems.

- RTM Education Chair Michael Whitney inquired about the rising bus costs for field trips and wanted to know if the students will have opportunities to attend field trips next year. He stated that stipends should be increased for coaches and clubs. Superintendent Austin shared that the stipends are negotiated with the Groton Education Association. Mr. Whitney also discussed adding staff members to the School-based Health Clinic (SBHC). Superintendent Austin stated that the SBHC is grant funded and families need to sign up to receive services from SBHC. Per a request from Mr. Whitney, Superintendent Austin reviewed the Board's CIPs.
- Counselor Merritt inquired as to when the roof at CB will be repaired. Superintendent Austin responded it will be repaired this summer. Counselor Merritt also commented about the Culinary Arts Program and having the students stay in the school they are registered in instead of going to Grasso Tech and to upgrade the space we have for the program.
- Counselor Rusk inquired as to the number of full-time and part-time employees brought in under the ARP ESSER grant. David Fleig responded 37 full-time and 6 part-time. She stated that they are important staff; however, if we can't find grants to pay for these employees, then we need to consider alternatives. She had a question regarding historical revenue.
- Counselor Bordelon had questions regarding honors courses and the need for more funding for sports.
- Mayor Franco had questions regarding Tutor hours, transportation, Paraprofessional raises, HVAC grant for this year, ARP ESSER funds and how many staff are being carried over to next year. Mayor Franco noted that there will be a Public Hearing on the budget next month.
- Board Member Thomas discussed the excess revenue that has gone back to the town but was not reserved for education and how this excess revenue could be used for CIPs.
- Board Chair Weitlauf noted that there will be another meeting on the budget on Thursday, February 25, where the Board will be looking at efficiencies and reductions proposed by the Superintendent. He also spoke about changes in legislation regarding Interdistrict Magnet School tuitions and noted that the State may only be picking up half the cost.
- Board Member Shulman stated that he is torn on how to balance the needs of the students and the financial burden to the taxpayers.

III. ADJOURNMENT

Board of Education – **MOTION:** Ackerman, Meade; to adjourn at 7:28 p.m.

PASSED UNANIMOUSLY

Town Council – **MOTION:** Parker, Rusk; to adjourn at 7:28 p.m.

PASSED UNANIMOUSLY

RTM Education Committee – **MOTION:** McElroy, Parrella; to adjourn at 7:28 p.m.

PASSED UNANIMOUSLY