

**New Hartford Public Schools
Board of Education Regular Meeting (In-Person)
Ann Antolini Elementary School – Library
March 5, 2024 @ 7:00PM**

PRESENT: Superintendent Jeffrey Sousa; Chairman Timothy Klepps; Vice Chairman Thomas Buzzi; Members: Meagan Albert; Timothy Russell; Deirdre Tindall (via Google meet); Frank Rodenberg; Board Secretary Penny Miller and Recording Secretary Elizabeth Domas.

Also Present: Kelly Carroll, Amy Kennedy, Michael Lynch and Heather Mathes.

ABSENT: Board Members Kelly O’Dell Longhi and Kristin Young

- A. Chair to Open Meeting:** @ 7:04PM the meeting was called to order by Chairman Timothy Klepps.
- B. Pledge of Allegiance**
- C. Communications to the Board of Education/Public Comment:** Superintendent Jeffrey Sousa notified the Board of a letter received from Colleen Wipperman and has stated the letter submitted has been addressed by the Board Chairman Timothy Klepps.
- D. Board of Education Chair’s Report:** Chairman Timothy Klepps discussed two items to bring to the attention of the Board. First, he asked the Board members on their thoughts for allowing public comment at the end of the meeting as there have been some requests. Vice Chairman Thomas Buzzi is in favor of allowing more public comment for greater transparency and interaction with the public. Frank Rodenberg stated he feels the idea is worth a try to see how it works, with the opportunity to re-discuss the idea later in time. Mr. Klepps noted there is no requirement to have public comment based on the Boards policies and bylaws. Penny Miller agrees to offer public comment based on the subjects the Board has talked about during the meeting. Mr. Klepps agrees to allow public comment at the end and will add it to the next agenda. The second item to discuss is a letter of resignation received from Board Member Kelly O’Dell Longhi dated March 1, 2024, effective immediately. This letter was received by the Town Clerk on March 5, 2024. Board of Education policies require the Board of Education to post for a replacement and this must be within 30 days of resignation. The position, once filled by a vote from the Board of Education, will be temporary until the next election in November 2025, and must be filled by a democrat, unaffiliated or independent.
- E. Superintendents Report:** Superintendent Jeffrey Sousa voiced that March is Board Member appreciation month, Board Members are volunteers and work tirelessly, they serve on sub-committees, and sacrifice many hours of their time. Superintendent Jeffrey Sousa expressed his appreciation to all the present Board Members.

Students Representatives:

Fifth graders are working on multiplication and division in order to solve real world problems. In science, students are learning the watery planet unit, only 1% of all water on our planet is drinkable. This topic is hands on, engaging and very educational. In social studies, students are studying the American Revolution. Many students are involved in band or chorus and love outdoor recess. In first grade, students have lots of fun learning about birds and their adaptations; they also learn about the sun, moon and stars. Students create poems based on the point of view of the sun and will get to present their poems in front of their classmates. In math they are learning patterns in place values, they will be able to subtract 2 digit numbers.

Revised Capital Expenditure: Mr. Sousa notes a special thanks to the Board of Finance for helping to achieve the goal of improving the infrastructure of security in the schools. The revised capital expenditure from 2-21-2024 is available online and brings us closer to the local match for the security grant. An item being worked on and in the process of is installing ballistic glass coating and glazing on windows in all the schools. The next step would be adding the interoperability of radios and communications from inside the school to police and emergency services.

ASO Update: Mr. Sousa stated the security sub-committee met, and a job description is in place. The approximate cost for an Armed Security Officer would be \$42,000 to rotate through the three schools. Frank Rodenberg questioned when members will see the job description. Frank Rodenberg clarified to Mr. Sousa the amount of \$42,000, what does this cover? Mr. Sousa stated this covers the salary at \$29.00 an hour for 180 school days, another \$8,000 has been allocated in the event benefits are needed. Equipment costs have not been factored in yet. The service could be purchased now for next year. Originally \$75,000 was earmarked for security, some of the funding was used towards immediate needs like asbestos testing, there is \$50,000 left.

F. Routine Business:

Approval of Minutes: February 21, 2024 (Special Meeting)

MOTION by Penny Miller to approve the minutes from the February 21, 2024, Special Meeting as presented. Second by Frank Rodenberg.

UNANIMOUS
Motion passes

Expenditure Report:

MOTION by Penny Miller to approve the expenditure report as presented. Second by Tim Russell.

UNANIMOUS
Motion Passes

G. Old Business:

2024-2025 Budget Workshop #1

Mr. Timothy Klepps thanks the Board members for submitting their questions to Superintendent Sousa regarding the 2024-2025 budget since the previous meeting. Mr. Sousa began going through the many questions submitted. The first question stated was what would be the absolute non-negotiable line items? Mr. Sousa stated special education (legally bound), contractual increases (negotiations), and insurance. In regard to regular education, Board Members expressed their desire for the increase in this section to be closer to 3% than 6%. Mr.

Sousa noted a Kindergarten teacher was hired due to more students in the summer, a library media specialist was hired (the school year began without one, and this also came with a salary increase) and the addition of a school counselor (there is now a school counselor at each school every day of the week). There is a grant that pays for the school counselor, the grant runs out in September of 2024. Although the number of students is projected to decrease by 18, this number is very hard to predict. A suggestion was made to have a parent volunteer to assist with the yearbook to offset the cost of some savings. There are salary increases that are due to higher education and longevity. Line item 560 for magnet school tuition was questioned. How many students were paid for in the 2022-2023 year? The answer is 7 students, and each student was \$6,300 for tuition to the CREC, and 1 student graduated. A recommendation was made by a Board member to cut Travel line 519 to \$1,500. In Special Education the budget increase of about 25% is necessary to decrease outplacement and keep students within the district. In addition, to provide mental health support for the 110 students. Special Education will see savings of \$25,000 under grant 611 which will be utilized against this budget. Under Pupil Services, 313, \$17,000 was spent in 2022-2023. A Board member inquired about the high number for this line. This line is set aside for third party independent evaluations for special needs if necessary to help students and families be in the same understanding as the schools. Mr. Sousa noted in teaching supplies, 616, the increase of \$3,000 is due to the implementation of pre-school screeners. Moving forward to the health services, under Lead Nurse Stipend 112, the increase of \$1,000 was due to a contractual agreed increase. Then in line 113, specifically how often are nurses working after hours? Mr. Sousa noted this depends on the needs of the students. Overtime has been added to provide students with treatment after school. Are we seeing the same need for substitute nurses? Mr. Sousa replied yes due to the fact that nurse substitutes are mandated to conduct professional development. In the Improvement of Instruction section, line 593, a Board member asked, "can this be removed?" The answer is no because not all booklets can be printed in house. The Curriculum Software, 618, \$30,000 increase is because a transfer was made to move this line item from Technology to Curriculum because there is a different level of importance under Curriculum. Media Services and Supplies has an increased cost for book repairs and to have optimal books in stock. Also under Library Media Centers, 641, there is a 40% increase in online subscriptions, Mr. Sousa noted they are always looking for different companies and longer term subscriptions in an effort to save money. Superintendent Sousa would partner with region 7 if the opportunity were to arise for savings. Board of Education, 689, Recognition and Hospitality for the District, the purpose of this line is to honor staff members or provide sympathy during difficult times. Recognition and Hospitality was recommended by more than 1 Board Member to reduce, Mr. Sousa suggested decreasing from \$1,000 to \$500. Board of Education members feel this line could start at a slower pace. Central Office, 112 & 113, Board members notice the increases are double on average for other staff. What are examples of overtime for central office staff? Examples of OT in the Central Office are completing FOI requests and extra hours for the part-time bookkeeper. Central Office, 690, there is a 16.7% increase solely due to the cost of paper. In the School Offices category, 730, the budget increased from \$2500 to \$5,000 because the line was short previously and these funds are used to purchase walkie talkies that would cover the entire school grounds. Plant Operations, 112, the increase is an excess of other staff, contingencies due to ongoing negotiations. Line 115, 2022-2023 does not indicate that Custodial Substitutes needs to double, a suggestion was made to cut in half. Utilities, 402, Refuse Subsection a Board member inquired on the increase from \$9,500 to \$14,000, Mr. Sousa noted the cost to eliminate trash is increasing and he continually works with First Selectman Dan Jerram on the

ongoing trash project increases. A member proposed line 406, Emergency Repairs, be increased by \$7,000 not \$17,000. Building Maintenance, a clerical note was stated for line 407, building maintenance should be moved to service contracts, the \$30,000 should be moved under Furniture for supplies such as toiletries and cleaning products and will be taken under advisement. Employee Benefits, 6100, 18% increase at this time. Good news to share is the insurance which was 11.6% will be dropped to 10.95%. This takes \$85,000 off the proposed budget. Pupil Transportation section 2700, line 510, this is our last year to be contracted with Dattco, bidding will go out for 2025-2026 along with Northwest Region 7. Under CAPEX a \$150,000 security investment allows at least \$251,000 on a 60% match on average to upgrade walls, windows, and surveillance. This translates to a total Capital of \$380,000 for a \$285,000 investment.

Frank Rodenberg stated some questions regarding employees, he clarified the increase in occupational therapy (.2) and how many other new positions are in this budget. The answer is 1 Special Education teacher at Ann Antolini. In addition, 1 new para educator, previously paid by pandemic relief. The Board of Education asked for the total number of staff in Special Education. There are: 12.6 Certified Staff which include 6 Special Education Teachers, 2 School Psychologists, 1.6 Speech Language Pathologists, 2 Pre-K Teachers and 1 Social Worker. How many paras are in this line? There are 17.5 Special Education Para, 5.5 Regular Education Para Educators, a total of 24 Paras. This line includes a Data Manager who is not a Para. Penny Miller asked for clarification on the employee being funded by a grant. Additionally, Penny Miller questioned the Utilities Refuse, Penny mentioned that region 7 has a 0% for this line and New Hartford has a fee. Mr. Sousa will inquire about region 7. Penny Miller asked for a status on the solar panel project, Mr. Sousa stated we were not granted the project and an application was re-submitted for a Second round, hopefully there will be an answer in April, the application is submitted to Eversource and federally funded. Thomas Buzzi asked Superintendent Sousa for clarification on what can and can't be cut from the budget. Thomas Buzzi inquired what the increase be if the non-requirements were flatlined? The Board of Education would like to have a responsible number to bring to the Board of Finance at the meeting on March 16, 2024. What does the Board want to do, considering today is March 5, 2024? Chairman Timothy Klepps feels the Board of Education needs to give Superintendent Sousa and idea of what percentage the members feel is appropriate and more of an idea as to where the Board would like the budget to be.

MOTION by Timothy Klepps to challenge Superintendent Sousa to come back to the Board with his assessments of cuts to reduce the budget down/within 5.25%. The cut would be roughly around \$275,000, with a list of items adjusted to get to the 5.25%. Second by Penny Miller.

Aye: Meagan Albert, Thomas Buzzi, Timothy Klepps, Tim Russell and Deirdre Tindall (5)

Naye: Penny Miller (1)

Abstained: Frank Rodenberg (1)

(5-1-1)

Motion Passes

MOTION by Penny Miller for approval 2024-2025 Capital as proposed. Second by Thomas Buzzi.

Aye: Meagan Albert, Thomas Buzzi, Timothy Klepps, Frank Rodenberg, Tim Russell and Deirdre Tindall (6)

Naye: Penny Miller (1)

(6-1)

Motion Passes

H. New Business:

Healthy Food Certification Application Process 2024-2025

Vote 1: Required vote for participation in healthy food option of HFC.

This vote is required for all BOEs that participate in the NSLP. Each BOE must vote “yes” or “no” to participate in the healthy food option of C.G.S. Section 10-215f and follow the Connecticut Nutrition Standards (CNS). The motion and BOE-approved meeting minutes must include the exact motion language below:

MOTION by Timothy Klepps to vote yes on Vote 1 “Pursuant to C.G.S. Section 10-215f, the New Hartford Board of Education certifies that all food items offered for sale to students in the schools under its jurisdiction, and not exempted from the Connecticut Nutrition Standards published by the Connecticut State Department of Education, will comply with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards during the period of July 1, 2024, through June 30, 2025. This certification shall include all food offered for sale to students separately from reimbursable meals at all times and from all sources, including but not limited to school stores, vending machines, school cafeterias, culinary programs, and any fundraising activities on school premises sponsored by the school or non-school organizations and groups”. Second by Penny Miller.

UNANIMOUS
Motion Passes

Vote 2: Required vote for food exemptions for BOEs choosing healthy food option of HFC.

This vote is required for all BOEs that vote “yes” to participate in the healthy food option. The motion and BOE-approved meeting minutes must reflect a “yes” or “no” vote to allow food exemptions using the exact motion language below.

MOTION by Timothy Klepps to vote yes on Vote 2, “The New Hartford Board of Education will allow the sale to students of food items that do not meet the Connecticut Nutrition Standards provided that the following conditions are met: 1) the sale is in connection with an event occurring after the end of the regular school day or on the weekend; 2) the sale is at the location of the event; and 3) the food items are not sold from a vending machine or school store. An “event” is an occurrence that involves more than just a regularly scheduled practice, meeting, or extracurricular activity. For example, soccer games, school plays, and interscholastic debates are events but soccer practices, play rehearsals, and debate team meetings are not. The “regular school day” is the period from midnight before to 30 minutes after the end of the official school day. “Location” means where the event is being held and must be the same place as the food sales”. Second by Penny Miller.

UNANIMOUS
Motion Passes

I. Executive Session:

Financial Matter re: Teacher Retirement Board

MOTION by Penny Miller to enter executive session at 8:49PM to discuss a personnel matter and to invite Superintendent Jeff Sousa to join the Board of Education for the purpose of discussing a Financial Matter re: Teacher Retirement Board. Second by Thomas Buzzi.

UNANIMOUS
Motion Passes

*Everyone in attendance left the meeting.
The Board of Education and Superintendent Sousa remained for Executive Session.*

Executive Session ended at 8:58PM.

MOTION by Penny Miller to reimburse Superintendent Sousa in the amount of \$1,487.26 for his Connecticut Retirement Contribution. Second by Tim Russell.

UNANIMOUS
Motion Passes

J. Adjournment:

MOTION by Penny Miller to adjourn the meeting at 9:00PM. Second by Frank Rodenberg.

UNANIMOUS
Motion Passes

Motions following Executive Session were provided by Penny Miller to the Recording Secretary.

Respectfully submitted by,
Elizabeth Domas, Recording Secretary

Recorded Regular and Special Board of Education meetings will be posted to:
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCX-ZlomWmjG81dc_QM3rfg

Attachments:

Letter from Colleen Wipperman (available from Town Clerk upon request)

Resignation Letter Kelly O'Dell Longhi (available from Town Clerk upon request)