

New Hartford Public Schools
Board of Education Special Meeting (In-Person)
Ann Antolini Elementary School – Library
March 13, 2024 @ 6:00PM

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

Also Present: Kelly Carroll (via Google meet) Amy Kennedy, Michael Lynch and Heather Mathes.

- A. Chair to Open Meeting:** @ 6:00PM the meeting was called to order by Chairman Timothy Klepps.
- B. Pledge of Allegiance**
- C. Board of Education Chair’s Report:** Timothy Klepps and Jeffrey Sousa attended the Board of Finance meeting Tuesday March 12, 2024, to present the CAPEX (Capital Expenditures). There were several questions, many on the Security Grant, an Executive Session regarding security will likely occur at the Board of Finance meeting on Saturday March 16, 2024.
- D. Superintendents Report:** Superintendent Sousa is proud of students and how they engage in the learning. He also extends a great job done by staff members. The Board of Finance has been invited to tour the schools on Friday March 15, 2024, at 9:00AM, the order will be Bakerville, Ann Antolini then New Hartford Elementary.
- E. New Business:**
Increasing Educator Diversity Plan: In accordance with Public Act 23-167, the Boards of Education in the State of Connecticut are required to submit a plan to increase diversity within the school educators. Mr. Sousa thanked the entire team who played a part in helping to create this plan. This plan was created with the help of EdAdvance and other local Superintendents, in an effort to promote and hire cultural diversity candidates. There are three main sections to the plan: *recruitment, hiring and selecting, and retention*. This plan requires the New Hartford Board of Education approval before submitting it to the State of Connecticut.

MOTION by Penny Miller to approve the Increasing Educator Diversity Plan. Second by Tim Russell.

Kristin Young had concerns with the timeline and clarified if there may need to be more time to complete this plan. Thomas Buzzi clarified the quota that is intended to be met. Mr. Sousa reassured Board members the plan in place is to ensure that the Board of Education is not biased or discriminatory. Thomas Buzzi stated measured success cannot

be determined by the percentage of diversity within the staff members. Thomas Buzzi feels merit is most important and should be mentioned in this Increasing Educator Diversity Plan. Deirdre Tindall agrees, the word merit needs to be in this document as well, hiring needs to be based on qualifications not just on race. Superintendent Sousa states that interviews and resumes is the merit, which is within the interview process already in place, Sousa notes the individual hired will always be the best candidate for the job, based on qualifications and what they bring to the table.

AMENDED-MOTION by Penny Miller to approve the Increasing Educator Diversity Plan but to include the “*merit*” of the applicant in several areas within the plan as suggested by Thomas Buzzi and Deirdre Tindall, then submit for approval. Second by Tim Russell.

**UNANIMOUS
Motion Passes**

F. Old Business:

2024-2025 Budget

Superintendent Sousa recapped the last budget workshop, where the Board voted to reduce the proposed budget increase to 5.25%. The original Superintendents proposed budget started at \$769,364 at 8.17%. The Board of Education voted to reduce the proposed budget by \$275,000 to target a 5.25% increase.

Several savings now noted within the proposed budget are -\$25,000 (IDEA611 Grant) and -\$8,461 Medical 10.95% (was 11.6%) which brings the proposed budget down to \$735,903 or 7.81%.

The next proposed reductions are -\$130,000 (Excess Cost Grant, moving the excess cost grant revenue from the town revenue to the Board of Education budget to offset expenses in the amount of \$130,000), -\$38,000 Tuitions/Outplacements, -\$20,000 Emergency Repairs, -\$10,000 Legal Fees, -\$15,000 in Maintenance (Plant Operations), -\$5,000 in Online Subscriptions, -\$500 in Recognition and Hospitality and lastly -\$500 in Curriculum Materials. This is a total of \$231,000 reduced from the proposed budget and this reduces the increase from \$735,903 to \$516,900 or 5.49%.

Mr. Klepps expressed the importance of the Board of Education to understand the Excess Cost Grant, which was discussed at the Board of Finance meeting last night. This grant is currently reimbursed on the town revenue side, currently sits in general town budget and has been since the start of the grant, this is money returned to the town from the State of Connecticut. There has been some debate whether this should be moved to the Board of Education side and requires further discussion. If the excess costs revenues are not applied directly to the education expenses, the budget increase is higher than the 5.49%.

The other proposed budget reduction is -\$16,000 for Occupational Therapy (.2 FTE=1 Day, from 5 days down to 4) which would get the budget reduced to \$500,900 or 5.31%.

The next budget cut would be -\$19,000 for the Speech Language Pathologist (.2FTE=1 Day, from 4 days down to 3) less of service, this would bring the budget to \$481,900 or 5.11%.

The 23-24 Occupational Therapist works 4 days a week (with 50 students), the proposed budget increases the working day by 1. 23-24 Speech Language Pathologist works 3 days a week (with 22 students), the proposed budget increases the working day by 1.

Third grade has significant need for Special Education, which is approximately 20%. The importance of small class sizes is to make sure classes are not overburdened with services, to have so many needs in one classroom, increase class size and implement the needs that are being met. Superintendent Sousa would not recommend increasing class sizes. Smaller class sizes effectively manage the needs of each child to make sure services are being met. There are currently 62 Kindergarteners who will go into First Grade.

MOTION by Kristin Young to approve the proposed reductions of the initial first batch which is a budget of \$516,900 or 5.49% increase to send to the Board of Finance with Board of Education approval. Second by Tim Russell.

Thomas Buzzi stated he does not disagree with the proposed budget but does not think this will cut it. Penny Miller is not in favor of these cuts, and the budget increase needs to be closer to 4%. Meagan Albert suggested seeing what the Board of Finance says on Saturday in regard to the \$130,000 Excess Cost Grant. Tim Russell says that 4% sounds great although he reminded everyone of inflation but could not be in favor of cutting staff. Tim Russell believes other items can be adjusted rather than staff. Penny Miller doesn't believe in a reduction in force but there are other areas where cuts can be made. Frank Rodenberg supports the proposed budget at 5.49% to provide the best education possible. Timothy Klepps does not want to cut Special Education but feels he would like the budget increase to be at 5.11% (\$481,900) whether it means cutting those two positions or finding other areas to cut. Kristin Young does not wish to amend her motion based on the discussion.

Aye: Meagan Albert; Timothy Russell; Deirdre Tindall; Frank Rodenberg; Kristin Young

Naye: Thomas Buzzi; Timothy Klepps; Penny Miller

Abstained:

(5-3-0)

Motion Passes

G. Adjournment:

MOTION by Penny Miller to adjourn the meeting at 7:04PM. Second by Thomas Buzzi.

UNANIMOUS

Motion Passes

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