

BUDGET PUBLIC HEARING
Inter-Lakes School Board
Inter-Lakes Middle/High School Community Auditorium
1 Laker Lane, Meredith, NH
February 7, 2024

MINUTES

I. CALL TO ORDER

School Board Chair Merrill called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

III. RECORD ROLL

Members Present:

Mrs. Lisa Merrill, Chair
Mr. Mark Billings, Vice-Chair
Mr. Charley Hanson, Secretary
Ms. Siobhan Connelly
Mr. Duncan Porter-Zuckerman

Administrators Present:

All SAU #2
School District Administrators

Members Absent:

Mr. Craig Baker (Absent with Notice)
Ms. Nancy Starmer (Absent with Notice)

Others Present:

Mr. Jason Cornelissen, Auditorium Manager
Public (In-person & Remote)

IV. PUBLIC HEARING ON THE PROPOSED 2024-2025 INTER-LAKES SCHOOL DISTRICT BUDGET

Mrs. Merrill opened the Budget Public Hearing at 6:00 p.m.

Superintendent Moriarty used the handout for the meeting to provide an overview. The detailed presentation included the proposed 2024-2025 Operational Budget in the amount of \$32,648,877 which represents an increase of \$1,166,294 or 3.70% over the voted current year budget. She then reviewed 2 Warrant Articles; Article 3 and Article 5 - Article 3 the Support Staff Collective Bargaining Agreement and Article 5 the Operating Budget Overview.

Superintendent Moriarty started with a detailed review of Article 3 (pages 5-8). Within this Article Superintendent Moriarty shared the cost items in detail for the proposed contract between the Inter-Lakes School Board and Inter-Lakes School Support Staff Association. This will be a 3-year agreement with salary increases of 5% on base every year for 3 years. At the time of the proposed contract the Association currently represented 60 people, which include the positions of Classroom Paraeducators, Title I Paraeducators, Speech Language Assistants, Media Generalist Assistants, and School Nurse Assistants. Proposed paraeducators moving from just under 7-hour per day to 7.5 hours per day. The increased hours for the support staff will give them access to the full time benefit for health insurance (pages 5-8). Superintendent Moriarty went over the costs in detail which include wage increases, differentials, health insurance, and dental insurance. Referring to the overall cost summary (pages 7, 8).

Superintendent Mary went over Article 5 (pages 9-12), the two main drivers of the budget are the costs related to student services and health insurance. Student services, excluding health and dental, have increased by \$954,356, which is an increase of 17.76% over the 2023/2024 voted budget. These student services include Special Education, Extended School Year (for students who will regress over the summer), Bilingual, Special Education Coaches, Psychology, Speech Services, Physical and Occupational Therapy, and Special Education Transportation. This increase is a direct result of the more complex needs for the students receiving these specialized services. Superintendent Moriarty went into detail for the proposed staffing increases and the proposed staffing decreases. With the reduction of 9.0 FTE for paraeducators this saves \$266,670, which will assist with the cost of bringing on more specialized supports through contracted services. Health and Dental insurance have increased by \$505,852, which is an increase of 10.84% over the 2023/2024 voted budget (page 10). Superintendent Moriarty went into detail with the increases for each category of New Hampshire Retirement, Regular Education, Athletics, Guidance, Technology Services, Curriculum and Development, School Board Services, Office of the Principal, Principal Support, Facilities, Transportation, Retirement, Non-Bargaining Salaries, and the Collective Bargaining Agreements (pages 10-12); a detailed comparison of staffing and function (page 17), Special Education 5 year cost comparison (page 20), facilities 5 year comparison (page 22), Facilities capital improvement plan (page 22), Estimated Revenue Information (page 23), Assessment formula (page 24), Tax Bill for public (page 25), and the master operating budget (pages 26-45).

Superintendent Moriarty gave the public time to review pages 26-45; Master Operating Budget.

School Board Chair Merrill opened the floor for public questions and comments regarding the proposed budget.

Mr. Richard Juve of Meredith asked about when the last time legal services were bidded out.

Superintendent Moriarty explained that she is not aware in her tenure of bidding for attorney services.

Mr. Richard Juve of Meredith asked about retainer fees for legal services.

Superintendent Moriarty explained we do not have a retainer; generally, when we have an issue they bill us by the hour for that time. We do not have a retainer for attorneys.

Mr. Richard Juve of Meredith asked about how much was spent on legal services last year.

Superintendent Moriarty referred to pg. 39 line 433; 2023 budgeted \$25,000, the actual cost was \$59,286. Budgeted for this coming year \$32,000. We have not looked into bidding for legal services.

Mr. Richard Juve addressed Chair Merrill to bid out legal services.

Chair Merrill responded thank you, point well taken.

Mrs. Karen Sticht from Meredith asked about what legal services represent and what was the overspending due to.

Superintendent Moriarty explained legal services were used for negotiations last year as well as this year that had not been planned.

Mrs. Karen Sticht from Meredith stated that under the negotiations line it states 0.

Superintendent Moriarty explained it has not been separated out. It's the legal services when asking support of the attorney for negotiations it has fallen under legal services

Mrs. Karen Sticht asked if the expense had to do with Municipal Resources coming in to investigate the protocol issues.

Superintended Moriarty explained no.

Mrs. Karen Sticht asked how much was charged for the investigation.

Superintendent Moriarty explained that was a part of the current years 2023-2024 budget and that she did not have the amount.

Mrs. Karen Sticht asked Superintendent Moriarty to summarize for all the people at the Public Hearing some of the cuts that had been made for the 24/25 regular education budget.

Superintendent Moriarty explained the Board is planning to utilize other funds to address food service costs which was \$55,000, talked about the health insurance reduction of about \$81,000, facility site work looking to money that had been set aside to do stadium seating, the plan is to shift the funds to facility site work, particularly Laker Lane. Additionally, athletic infrastructure funds being repurposed for the ILES playground. The Board had money that had been set aside for athletic infrastructure improvements, particularly focusing on the locker room. The reality is the locker room is going to cost more money than the funds that are set aside. So about \$150,000 of that has been repurposed for the Inter-Lakes Elementary School playground. We have accessibility issues on the playground and we need to make that an inclusive playground so that all students have that opportunity to access the play area.

Two bus routes, creating a savings of \$147,528. The Boston Field Experience for grade 8 was reduced by \$25,000, the trip is still occurring it just will be to a lesser degree. Regular education supplies was reduced by \$20,000 we had previously reduced it so that is actually more of a reduction. Athletics we reduced six assistant coaches at \$19,000. High jump mats, indoor sound system in the gymnasium and the Hall of Fame totaling \$18,000 was reduced from athletics. Lawn care was reduced by \$15,000. Secretarial was proposed to have one of the positions become year-round. The Board voted to reduce that by \$10,497. Naturalists and Residence is a great part of Inter-Lakes Elementary School. Thank you to the GERALYN ANNE FOUNTAIN MEMORIAL FUND because they have said they will fund that so we reduced the budget by almost

\$8,000. Co-curricular supplies we reduced by \$7,600. Reduced a grade 5 field trip, which with the bus was about \$5,300. Technology we reduced replacement equipment by \$5,000. Office of the Principal we reduced supplies there by \$4,500. Library books, we reduced book lines by \$4,500. Library supplies we reduced by \$2,500. Chose to defer the facilities roof, a portion of it and reduced by \$83,000. We ultimately reduced the nine para-educator position which was over \$200,000. We had originally proposed a second student services coordinator for the Middle High School, that was reduced by \$168,000. Then reduced the special education teacher through the natural attrition that was \$134,000. We reduced author illustrator at Sandwich Central School and assemblies by \$4,000. We reduced ILES author illustrator by \$2,600. We reduced winter recreation at ILES by \$3,000. We reduced extended school year speech service by \$10,000. We reduced homeless transportation to \$1, that was a reduction of \$2,499. Again, hoping we can lean on that Trust I mentioned earlier. We reduced co-curricular transportation by \$8,000. We reduced curriculum teacher stipends, these are stipends that we pay teachers outside of contracted time during summer or other non-contracted times which was reduced by \$25,459. We reduced conference and travel for some non-bargaining by \$2,300. As we reviewed the budget again we did notice a correction we could make related to athletics retirement that was a \$25,000 savings. Guest speakers for guidance was reduced by \$3,000. That comes to just about \$1,300,000.

Mrs. Karen Sticht asked about the co-curricular transportation, like the trip to Boston, does that mean it was reduced or eliminated.

Superintendent Moriarty explained for Boston it was not eliminated, the Boston field experience started out as originally being funded at \$40,000 so we've reduced it by \$25,000

Mrs. Karen Sticht asked about Merrowvista and Cape Cod Trips and if they are still in the budget.

Superintendent Moriarty explained yes, they are still in the budget.

Mrs. Karen Sticht asked just to start at the beginning again the proposed staffing for the administrative level student services coordinator for ILES will that person go to all of the schools.

Superintendent Moriarty explained that no that person will only be at ILES.

Mrs. Karen Sticht asked so if the seventh grade is a difficult year because of the special needs students and they run into an issue where they need special education personnel who takes care of that.

Superintendent Moriarty explained that would be our Director of Student Services, which is the Director for SAU 2, which supports Inter-Lakes and Ashland. That person, Lisa Holiday, who started this year, because of the needs at ILES we've actually really changed her time to be a very focused at ILES. We have used IDEA funds, grant funds to purchase time from our previous Director to help support in other areas and we look forward to the additional assistance.

Mrs. Karen Sticht asked will that leave a shortage in high school and that grade level will now have between 13 and 14 students in each section so how many adults will each teacher for that seventh-grade level have a para in the room as well.

Superintendent Moriarty explained not necessarily, that will be driven by special education needs. In terms of the high school, to take a teacher from the high school level in the area of math we do have our steam teachers who are also able to teach math. It most likely will impact potentially some electives, but there should still be other opportunities within the schedule to hopefully meet all needs.

Mrs. Karen Sticht asked how many students are in need of bilingual services.

Superintendent Moriarty stated Mrs. Dolloff will look that up as I don't have that off the top of my head relative to co-curricular transportation it's a reduction it's not an elimination so it was reduced by about \$8,000, but there are still funds for co-curricular we looked at the historical and felt we could make that reduction.

Mrs. Karen Sticht asked where will the trips not happen.

Superintendent Moriarty explained it's looking at historical and how things have costed out; it's not that the trips aren't happening. We did take away a fifth-grade experience which potentially maybe a trip to the YMCA camp that was added this year so we did reduce that in the budget. That's a trip that won't be happening.

Mrs. Karen Sticht asked was that the one to Plymouth Rock.

Superintendent Moriarty explained its Camp Mitena, but they do have another experience which is the Plymouth trip, the fifth-grade team and the administration will decide which trip they will not take. The funds were reduced by the cost of the Camp Mitena trip.

Mrs. Karen Sticht asked about number of out of district placement students.

Superintendent Moriarty explained that we do and because I want to be cautious for privacy reasons because that becomes very specific; we have under five.

Mrs. Karen Sticht asked if those five are basically the reason for the extra contracted services.

Superintendent Moriarty explained out of district placement is when we pay a tuition to go to a different school. We also have services that we are providing in district and what I was trying to share earlier is that some of the district services that we are providing in district are equivalent to what you might see in an out of district placement, hence the cost.

Mrs. Karen Sticht asked if we have under five placements how many out of district do we have in here.

Superintendent Moriarty explained that the students are not out of district because this is their district; they are not students from another district they are our students. There are some substantial programming needs that are driving some cost. I will

share that number is under five as well. But I again want to be cautious about privacy as we start to get very specific.

Mrs. Karen Sticht stated that she is getting at the point that we're putting in some pretty qualified contracted services, maybe it's time for us to start drawing in out of district students and get revenue from those districts.

Superintendent Moriarty stated reality is that the programming is so specific that we don't get an economy of scale. There is such specific programming that it's not as though you have ten people who can necessarily benefit from the services because it is very individualized.

Mrs. Karen Sticht then wanted to know how many bilingual students we have.

Mrs. Dolloff answered along with Superintendent Moriarty that we have eight.

Mrs. Karen Sticht asked do they often test out of the program.

Superintendent Moriarty asked Mrs. Holiday for her to answer. Superintendent Moriarty stated that they are required to test yearly so that it depends on the student.

Mrs. Karen Sticht asked the about the nine paraeducators, the \$270,000 for the nine paraeducators, and if that money is in the budget right now.

Superintendent Moriarty stated that it is and that is helping to offset those contracted services that we brought in that we did not budget for last year.

Mrs. Karen Sticht asked how will that be helpful for next year.

Superintendent Moriarty stated rather than keeping in the budget those nine paraeducators and the contracted services we have reduced those nine paraeducators so you will only have the cost of the contracted services.

Mrs. Karen Sticht asked then whatever's left over from this year will go into the fund balance at the end of the year.

Superintendent Moriarty responded correct.

Mrs. Karen Sticht asked if it will then be used for facility stuff.

Superintendent Moriarty responded that will be something that the Board will need to make some decisions about. There are no warrant articles that have been proposed for the facilities expendable trust or special education again because we anticipate it being a pretty tight year but the Board does have the authority at the end of the year to look at that fund balance and make some decisions about it.

Mrs. Karen Sticht asked about the six assistant coaches being eliminated and from what sports.

Superintendent Moriarty explained it will depend on the need as we look at our enrollment in athletics and how we will ebb and flow with numbers. Again, that could have an impact, we may not be able to run as many teams as we have in the past. We've tried to be very accommodating when we have large numbers and try to make

things work. We may not be able to offer as many opportunities. We'll have to wait and see.

Mrs. Karen Sticht stated so that would be really against regular education students more than special needs because special needs is getting a coach.

Superintendent Moriarty explained the special education coach is not an athletic coach; it's a coach if there was a student with special needs that in order to access a co-curricular needed support that's where the funds would come from. It also could be that a student needs to go to maybe part of their programming some kind of internship, a job internship, it would be to have somebody there to support them if that's apart of their IEP.

Mrs. Karen Sticht asked if contracted services people get benefits.

Superintendent Moriarty stated no they do not get benefits from the school district, that would be through their employer.

Mrs. Karen Sticht asked why couldn't our two resource officers, couldn't one of them direct traffic in the morning and the other direct traffic after school.

Superintendent Moriarty stated they are actually on campus helping to direct traffic So, even though they are not on 25 they are helping and assisting with arrival and dismissal.

Mrs. Pat McFarland from Meredith asked we have 158 disabled students how many of those students receive contracted services?

Superintendent Moriarty explained that under five are probably driving that cost.

Mrs. Pat McFarlin asked the tuition at non-public school your outplacements is down 40%, why aren't some of these students being outplaced. I would think it would make financial sense.

Superintendent Moriarty responded there are IEP teams that work together to make those decisions. There are realities that there are very limited placements particularly for younger children within accessible areas to our communities so that is the reality there are not necessarily out of district places available in some cases.

Mrs. Pat McFarlin asked if the less than five students could potentially be here next year as well.

Superintendent Moriarty responded absolutely; they are our students and they belong here. This is their school.

Mrs. Pat McFarlin asked if it is their school are they being best served at this school as opposed to a specialized outplacement environment.

Superintendent Moriarty responded that is a question for the IEP teams and the reality is there are laws that govern special education within the state and federal government and we adhere to those and so those placement decisions are made at that team level.

Mrs. Pat McFarlin asked as these kids are getting older, as they progress will the school district begin to look at outplacement to lower these costs.

Superintendent Moriarty stated that this is a conversation at the IEP Team level and it has to be an educational decision that is made and the reality is there are mechanisms in place for people if they disagree with placement that goes through a court type of system; called Due Process at the state.

Mrs. Pat McFarlin asked what happens if the school disagrees or if the parent disagrees with the outplacement.

Superintendent Moriarty responded it's both. So, it can be either way if the school disagrees or if the parents disagree with the placement decision. Either is able to engage in Due Process.

Mr. Jim McFarlin of Meredith asked just a couple of points I want to confirm that the cost per pupil for Inter-Lakes School District is \$29,876. The state average per pupil is \$20,900. So that's a roughly 1.5 times cost per student for our school district versus the state average is that accurate.

Superintendent Moriarty responded that appears to be accurate.

Mr. Jim McFarlin asked that with the decline in our test scores in the spring. We need to be taking concrete steps to improve the performance of students for their sake to compete in today's world and at least maintain our current cost structure if not work to reduce it. If people see improved performance of our students they're more willing to continue to invest in the district and the students. I honestly don't believe we're seeing that currently and that's a significant concern. Speaking for the taxpayer we care about education, we all do, we want to see our students excel and succeed. We would like to see an improvement in performance.

Superintendent Moriarty stated I agree that we certainly take this very seriously, we have definitely have seen challenges since COVID in terms of some trends. Within our data there are some spotlights of very high achievement and then there are some by grade levels with some real areas of concern. In our high school science department curricular changes have been made to try to address that, at the elementary level we have really been trying to tend to some literacy needs. There's a finite amount of time; it shifted focus; we are working very hard to improve; it's one of our performance goals. As a school district our goal is to meet or exceed the state established expectation for the year. We've asked our teachers to be working on modulars, which is something the state provides to practice for those tests. We are in agreement, we want our students to be well prepared and we want our students to have scores that reflect the investment that you're making. Please know we recognizes it's not where the community wants it, it's not where we want to see it and we are taking active steps.

Chair Merrill stated we have somebody online for their comment. Mr. Parsons read the following comment:

From Alyssa Yolda of Meredith states I understand that our community is grappling with the many needs of our growing town in funding. I strongly believe that whether you have children in our school system or not education is the basis of a strong, smart, and productive society. The best investment we can possibly make is in our children. Many residents are looking for ways to reduce recent tax increases and I understand the school board is under pressure to keep increases as minimal as possible and to look at every aspect of the school budget when it comes to cutting costs. I ask that we as a community choose to support our students and provide them with quality teachers, staffing, and educational experiences and opportunities that will lead to their growth and success in our fast-paced and ever-changing world. While there are several positions and programs in the proposed budget that have been cut, which I find alarming. I am submitting this comment to speak on one specifically and that is transportation. The proposed budget has cut two bus routes going from thirteen routes currently in place down to eleven routes. In addition to this change affecting the efficiency, comfort, and ridership of the school buses. I worry it will also affect a program that only just began this year at the start of the school year. The school began allowing for a limited number of students to request afternoon bus passes to ride the school bus from school to the Meredith public library for their after-school programming. These programs range in interest from games and crafts to book clubs for specific genres and popular book series, art project, collaborative board games, scavenger hunts, etc. The programming is designed for students ages ten and up and provides a safe educational and fun place for our tween and teen to go after school. The library staff has done a tremendous job with their programming; creating activities that the kids want to participate in and utilizing the space that many of our fellow neighbors helped to create. The library renovation project took a significant local fundraising; I know I am not alone in saying it's incredible rewarding and heartwarming to see the library being used by our community and especially enjoyed by the older kids whose lives are so often consumed by screens. For many working parents faced with the choice of having our kids to go home to an empty house after school versus having the opportunity to ride the bus to the library to participate in an enriching program in a safe and welcoming space. It's a no-brainer, I truly hope the students in the community will not lose this opportunity with the elimination of these two bus routes. The subsequent consolidation and reorganization of the remaining bus routes. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Mr. Juve of Meredith asked how many teacher aides does this budget include.

Superintendent Moriarty responded if you turn to page 17 in the budget packet, look at line three; there are five regular education para educators. If you look at line seven there are 52.9 special education para educators; 57.9 people are considered falling into the category you expressed.

Mr. Juve stated that its approximately one teacher aide for every teacher.

Superintendent Moriarty responded it doesn't work that way. In terms of regular education, two of those positions assist our program assistants who are supporting behavior so that supports all of Inter-Lakes Elementary School and of those positions

one supports all of the Middle-High School. There is another position that supports the front office at Inter-Lakes Elementary School, which also supports supervision during recess time and lunch time. Those are times you need to have students supervised and in terms of the paraeducators the 52.9, they are working directly with students. That it is part of their individual education plan. They're not assigned to teachers classrooms. Regular paraeducators, there are two at Inter-Lakes Elementary School that do support Kindergarten, those two para educators support three kindergarten classrooms. Younger children need additional assistance to be able to access their day and be able to get in and out for recess and supervised at recess. There are elementary schools that do have a classroom paraeducator in each classroom at the elementary level, Inter-Lakes does not have that.

Mr. Jeff Hubble of Center Harbor asked what is the average student per class.

Superintendent Moriarty responded that varies in terms of next year. Looking at the average number of teachers versus the number of students for next year, at the elementary level that is seventeen, at seventh and eighth grade that would be about fifteen, and the high school runs the gamut in some cases we have single digits and other cases up through twenty and above. That is because of selection and distribution of program of studies at the high school level which is very different. You may have some students who want to take French 4 and others who are taking small engines. The distribution can look very different from class to class. Average at the elementary is seventeen, and the Middle High School seventh and eighth grade for next year the average will be about fifteen.

Mrs. Karen Sticht asked in the orange pages on page 44 item 591 it talks of the multifunction activity bus if that is the one we own.

Superintendent Moriarty responded correct

Mrs. Karen Sticht asked why nothing was voted for it but the actual cost is \$97,941.

Superintendent Moriarty responded those were funds that were a separate warrant article a few years earlier and that we had not had the ability to purchase one. There was some money through a warrant article that had been set aside. It was not part of last year's budget but that is when we purchased it.

Mrs. Karen Sticht asked if it cost \$97,000.

Superintendent Moriarty responded it did

Mrs. Karen Sticht asked about the ones proposed to be leased and how much will they cost.

Superintendent Moriarty responded each year of the lease we are proposing \$36,000.

Mrs. Karen Sticht asked per activity van.

Superintendent Moriarty responded no combined that is for two of them.

Mrs. Karen Sticht asked if we are still paying people to retire so on page twelve the two retirements at \$119,301. How much will each of those teachers get and how is that determined?

Superintendent Moriarty stated there are two employees one is part of a benefits agreement and the second is part of a collective bargaining agreement. It's 50% of their highest pay of their final salary.

Mrs. Karen Sticht asked about other benefits.

Superintendent Moriarty responded they may qualify for health insurance because of their benefit agreement and when they were hired. In the teacher's contract, if you were hired after 2005 you no longer get that benefit and for administrators after 2012.

Chair Merrill convened the meeting with the board to reach a consensus, without taking an immediate vote. The purpose was to ensure that the board had sufficient time to address all questions and comments from the public. Chair Merrill then proceeded to announce that the budget would be put to a vote, with any potential changes made by the school board. Additionally, Chair Merrill invited everyone to attend the next meeting on Tuesday, February 13, 2024, at 6:00 p.m. at the Humiston Building. Expressing gratitude, Chair Merrill acknowledged that this would be their final school budget hearing and thanked everyone for the opportunity to serve as their representative. Chair Merrill closed the public meeting at 7:32 p.m.

The Board came to a consensus to discuss warrant articles at next meeting, February 13, 2024.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

A. Tuesday, February 13, 2024

Inter-Lakes School Board @ Humiston Building Conference Room

- Regular School Board Meeting - **6:00 p.m.**

B. Wednesday, March 6, 2024

Inter-Lakes School Board @ ILM/HS Community Auditorium

- Annual School District Meeting – **6:00 p.m.**

C. Tuesday March 12, 2024

Town Elections/School District Elections

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Billings moved, seconded by Mrs. Merrill, to adjourn meeting at 7:32 p.m. The motion carried unanimously.

