

MINUTES

Hoosac Valley Regional School Committee
School Committee Meeting
Monday, April 29, 2024 - 6:30 p.m.
Hoosac Valley High School
125 Savoy Road, Cheshire, MA

PRESENT: John Duval, Andrew Przystanski, Mike Henault, Adam Emerson, Robert Tetlow

ABSENT: Erin Milne

OTHERS: Superintendent Aaron Dean

104178 Call to Order

Chairman Adam Emerson called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

104179 Public Comment or Questions - None

104180 Approval of Minutes - March 25, 2024

MOTION: On Motion of Mike Henault and second by John Duval:

VOTED: to approve the March 25, 2024 School Committee minutes. The vote was unanimous.

104181 Report of Business Manager - None

Report of Sub Committee - None

104182 Communications -

A. Hoosac Valley Band Trip to Disney - 2025 - Amanda Watroba presented to the committee. The band has a long tradition of attending a trip to Disney on a 5 year rotation. This year is air travel as opposed to bus travel. This does not include marching in the parade. Disney does not include groups of less than 50, we are coming in at 30 students right now. The cost is \$1,756 per student. The band booster has been fundraising. No student will pay that full total amount. The chaperones will have to pay their full amount. Once there, they can use Disney transportation. A Dr. and Nurse on call 24/7. Adam Emerson: a fun trip, they learned a lot, sad they can't march in the parade. What is the goal to get the price down? Amanda: no more than \$1,000 for students, still fundraising to get the cost down further. Most students are already in the 900.00 range and some lower than that. Mike Henault: what if students can't afford it, even after fundraising? They reached out to local businesses, will send out letters in September, some businesses, in the past, have sponsored some students. Adam: how does it work for getting through security, etc. for 30 students? they will be there with their chaperones in smaller groups to make the process easier. Ratio is 5:1 or 6:1. Staying on Disney property. Students cannot come and go, they will be with their groups at all times. Sending travel coordinator the weight for the instruments, it adds between \$500-\$700 depending on the airline.

MOTION: On Motion of Andy Przystanski and second by Mike Henault:

VOTED: to approve the 2025 Band Trip to Disney. The vote was unanimous.

B. Grade 3 Field Trip to Dino-saur - Schenectady, NY - Kim Trimarch, Laurie Cantarella presented to the committee. This grade is highly interested in Dinosaurs, and are tying it into the curriculum. Every grade 3 students will be included on the field trip. The whole program is about 2 hours, leave after breakfast and will be back around 2:30, contained within the school day. Have about 10-12 chaperones. Due to prior fundraising, no cost to students, including transportation. Looking to go on May 30th. Students will bring their own lunch.

MOTION: On Motion of Mike Henault and second by John Duval.

VOTED: to approve the Grade 3 Field Trip to Dino-saur in Schenectady, NY. The vote was unanimous.

104183 Report of Superintendent -

A. Ratify Paraprofessional Contract - Executive Session - to go into Executive Session to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigating position of the public body and the chair so declares - the Committee will reconvene in open session. A roll call vote was taken. The committee went into executive session at 6:50. The committee reconvened in open session. A roll call vote was taken to enter back into open session at 7:00p.m.

MOTION: On Motion of Andy Przystanski and second by Mike Henault:

VOTED: to approve the Paraprofessional Contract. The vote was 4-0-1.

B. Budget - Revisiting discussion - based on an article that ran last week in Iberkshires about where things stood with the Town of Cheshire. Looking at placing the school budget increase on a ballot for a prop 2 ½ override and also looking at us wanting to level fund, not sure if they want the assessment or budget they want us to level fund, guessing the assessment. Want to get us on the same page in terms of discussing this. Providing more facts around the budget and the amount of work that has been done to really come forward with a balance of a reasonable number and something that can help move the district forward. Late last week a couple of sets of minutes came my way regarding discussion that happened with the Cheshire Board. Want to address a couple of pieces: In January we did meet with both Towns, had a discussion and laid all of our books on the table in terms of choice numbers, revolving accounts, etc. thought we had a good discussion about collaborating on the budget moving forward. Did mention in that meeting, the way the enrollment numbers shifted, shifted the assessment towards Cheshire per the Regional Agreement, not the ideal year for that to happen to Cheshire. We first compared last year's budget if we had put the same numbers of students in the doors versus Adams and Cheshire, the assessment would have increased in Cheshire by \$33,000 last year and decreased in Adams by \$33,000. We were starting there already if we had a true identical budget. Coming into this we knew the way the shifts played out with the Regional Agreement it was going to go into Cheshire direction this year. We invited representatives from the Cheshire Board to be part of our A & E discussion where we broke down the budget, what we were spending it on, why were spending it, what positions were a part of it, what positions were eliminated through attrition, we did a lot of work to reduce a lot of areas. Some discussion that happened in March, there were 2 good opportunities in March and 1 in February between the A & E meeting, the budget hearing, and budget vote for people to come and express some issues/concerns. No representatives came to those meetings. Aaron spoke about the March 12th Cheshire minutes that were brought to his attention, in particular stating we were administrative heavy and teachers not getting a fair salary. This past year, we ratified a contract that made substantial changes to the teacher's salary schedule and made us somewhat competitive across the county. We made significant shifts to get the teachers what they deserved. Negotiated a very fair contract. Administrative heaviness was brought up in their March 26th meeting dating back to a discussion that happened with us March 27, 2023, a year before. Recently, we have gone through a targeted audit with the state and they commended us for our administrative structures and the work we are doing with that. The state is not finding us administrative heavy. We need these positions to do a lot of work that needs to happen. It mentioned in the Selectboard minutes that the ACTA president at the time, expressed concerns about the administrative team at a school committee meeting last year and they stated it was not addressed. The issue had been discussed at that school committee meeting. The data that was brought forward was inaccurate, we addressed it and called it out and wasn't even close in terms of the numbers. The other piece is suggesting using E & D funds. ESSER did go away but we planned thoughtfully and brought positions in before this year. The use of E & D funds is not a possibility. We are strapped by a formula. There are many moving pieces around that. We have done a lot of work to put something forward that was responsible and also moving the district forward. Had a conversation with the Town Administrator, and she stated that they want to support us with the SRO, but a moot point if we don't know what our budget is going to be. Just want to put the facts out there. Mike Henault: the way the Iberkshire article presented the Cheshire budget was the reason for a 2 1/2 would be because of the school budget. Our budget in of itself does not necessitate a 2 ½ override, however the budget as a whole, there are other places to cut in the Town budget other than school, especially if you go line by line in the current Cheshire budget there are some increases, things are increasing everywhere, but the increases were minimal when you look at our side of the budget, the budget we are responsible for. This is the most fiscally responsible budget that has been brought forward by a Regional School District in a long time. Stripping it down any less, it would not provide services to the kids or staff. Aaron: disappointed, went through this process, we voted on the budget on March 26th and got a letter on March 27th stating that they are not supporting the budget, unless it is level funded. It put us in a tough position, not in a

position to really collaborate. The budget is filed and it is what it is at this point in time. Andy wanted to clarify that Cheshire did not send any representatives to any A & E meetings? Aaron responded no.

Our district is going up \$1,096,525 (5.1%, actually the same percentage that McCann is going up) in some cases, lower than a lot of district's around. Impact on local communities: \$108,00 more than last year. Adams decreased and Cheshire increased from last year's assessment.

Over half the increases aren't even from us. We have a budget for 1,000 students that we put forward, it really is 1,242 students, over 242 students that are school choice out, charter school students, tuitioned to special education programs or other specialized programs. We get numbers for each of these areas that we have zero control over but the communities are responsible for so the money essentially passes through us and looks like we are increasing this large amount but reality is if you look at: Budget increase breakdown: School Choice - \$175,000 (158); Charter - \$296,653 (76); Special Education Tuition - \$32,323 (8); Total: \$503,976; These assessments are not under our control. This is why we need our reserves. The special education tuition number has changed 5 times since we came up with that number. So why do we need our reserves? We are looking at probably another 400,000 to 500,000 in special education tuition out just based on families moving into the community. Capital Expenses: going up \$170,000 offset by E & D - \$170,000.

Budget increase breakdown: \$1,096,525 - Total increase; \$503,756 - 242 students we are financially responsible; \$170,000 - Maintenance, offset by E&D, No impact to Towns; \$422,769 - Benefit 990 students that come through our door.

Aaron went over the 5-year enrollment splits and the assessment numbers. See attached.

Looking at every area on the budget we can control, we did a good job with the numbers.

Accomplishment - established systems for student support; established systems for curriculum support and development; implemented systems for staff development, feedback and evaluation; implemented pathways, applied learning curriculum, expanded Pre-K

Aaron discussed the results of DESE target district review with the committee: - The district exhibits strengths in providing instructional support through dedicated staff and a structured curricular review process, with clear articulation of aligned instructional goals in district and school improvement plans; Each school has vetted, selected, and is implementing a social-emotional learning curriculum, offering a wide range of course offerings and academic pathways to support diverse student needs and interests; Teachers benefit from ongoing professional development and collaborative planning opportunities, promoting student engagement through differentiated instruction and an emphasis on career pathways; HVRSD has an established system for collecting and using data, which is a strength. The district follows a structured schedule for administering and reviewing benchmark and curricular assessments in all its buildings. These assessments cover academic and social-emotional domains, providing a comprehensive view of student performance. The HVRSD Universal Assessment Plan guides the district's approach to analyzing data; Notably, implementation of a Data Equity Pause Protocol demonstrates the district's commitment to equity; A dedicated team oversees the assessment inventory, ensuring alignment with instructional objectives and responsiveness to educators' feedback making HVRSD's use of multiple student data sources and well aligned prekindergarten through Grade 10 assessments a strength of the district; A strength of the district is its commitment to providing safe and supportive learning environments, supported by structured academic and behavioral systems. Through collaborative efforts with staff and community partners, the district takes a holistic approach to student support; The district's commitment to building a positive school culture and climate is evident in its implementation of social-emotional learning curricula and behavior initiatives. By reinforcing expected behaviors and values through its PRIDE program, HVRSD fosters community and belonging among students. The district also provides accessible resources that outline behavioral expectations and employ data-driven approaches to address student behavior.

The reality is, If we have a level funded assessment with the Town of Cheshire this year, that means we have to reduce our budget by \$570,000. Which system would you like me to dismantle in order for me to make that happen? We are building a District that people can be proud of and building a district that people should be supporting instead of trying to take down. We are doing a lot of great work and cannot in good conscience recommend anything other than going forward with this budget.

Mike Henault: participated with a group from Vanderbilt University in a study where we looked at school choice for Hoosac Valley. Interviewed parents, and the data that was collected ended up being a driver for the DIP but one thing that keeps coming back, many parents point out that one of the reasons why they are choosing to send their kids to other schools was the perception that low level of funding has created the perception that other districts have higher quality academic and nonacademic programming. The reason is

because of the perception that our school is not funded properly. Those numbers are also driving the costs to our Towns. There is a large number of Cheshire families that chose to go to other places. They say the reason they are leaving is because we are underfunded, because their kids have other opportunities elsewhere. Aaron and the team are doing an amazing job with a very small budget. The pressure on the Towns to manage their fiscal resources is stressful, there isn't a lot of money, but we are not going to fix it by not funding our schools, especially when there is not much to cut. That's why I am supporting this budget.

Adam Emerson: education is thought of as a product, investing a certain amount of money, expecting good results. In agreement with Mike, most fiscally sound budget. Thanks Aaron and team for this solid budget.

John Duval: we need every line item, moving in the right direction, clearly from what Aaron presented, and would hate to derail that with less money.

Mike Henault: To look at a school like Hoosac Valley and say we should have one principal and vice principal to run a school, it's not how schools are run anymore. Most districts have a much heavier district administration, look at our surrounding districts, they have assistant superintendents, director of social-emotional learning, director of family engagement that's at the admin. level in most districts in Western Massachusetts. We are putting more resources in the building administration that are closer to kids in helping our teachers meet the demands that are pretty challenging, and without support any teacher would struggle to do the work, the work is hard. If you don't work in education, you can't see that. Some of the misperception is you start adding assistant principals, adding Deans, that didn't happen years ago. Don't understand the resistance to this budget, other than being fueled by a lot of misperceptions of what it takes to educate a kid in 2024. Better lines of communication is a start.

Bob Tetlow: The needs are there, the numbers speak for themselves. A tough time asking for more money. This is a budget that can work. Would like to get support from the Towns.

Andy Przystanski: DESE comments were pretty compelling, nothing lavish in this budget. We are not the only ones seeing positive results, others are, and that helps back up our case.

Adam Emerson: you have the support of the Committee.

104184 **Chairman's Report** - None

104185 **Unfinished Business** - None

104186 **New Business** -None

104187 **Action Items** - None

104189 **For the Good of the Order**

Mike Henault: Call out Superintendent Dean for having some students at the State House recently.

Adam Emerson: Congratulations to Lyndsey McGinnis on her state award. Able to participate in 8th grade science fair, great to see all the projects. Able to go to Title 1 Elementary School Family Skate - they had 89 people show up and 27 students won a book that day. A really good time.

MOTION: On Motion of Mike Henault and second by John Duval

VOTED: To adjourn the meeting at 7:47 p.m. The vote was unanimous.

Respectfully Submitted,

Aaron Dean, Superintendent

Lisa Bresett, Recording Secretary

