

MINUTES



**Addison Central School District
Communications and Engagement Committee
Committee Meeting
Tuesday, December 17, 2024, 4:30 pm - 5:30 pm
49 Charles Avenue
Middlebury VT
05753**

ACSD District Vision and Mission

OUR VISION

Our vision is for all ACSD students to reach their full learning potential, have a sense of belonging in our schools, and enrich our community and the communities where they live in the future.

OUR MISSION

Our mission is to provide high-quality, equitable, and varied learning environments that inspire a passion for learning and growth among our students.

In Attendance

Joanna Doria; Laura Harthan; Tricia Allen; Wendy Baker

Not In Attendance

Mary Heather Noble

A. Call to Order Upon Reaching a Quorum

Meeting called to order at 4:35 p.m.

1. Introductions: Board Members, Administrators and Staff

Emily Blistein, ACSD Director of Communications & Engagement also present.

B. Public Comment

No public comment.

C. Recommendation to Approve the Minutes from November 19, 2024

Motion to approve the minutes of November 19, 2024.

Move: Joanna Doria Second: Laura Harthan Status: Passed

D. Committee Discussion:

1. Planning for a Public Meeting on the Budget Prior to Board Approval.

Tricia Allen expressed the enormity of the task before the Committee in organizing a public meeting for the FY26 prior to the Board's final approval. She requested help from committee members on how to move forward.

What is the current timeline, and what is the committee thinking? Wendy Baker clarified that the budget needs to be approved by January 20th, and that the full Board's last meeting

before then is January 17th -- so that is the Board's final opportunity to pass the budget in time to get materials to member towns for their town reports.

Tricia Allen noted that it may be difficult to pull off an on-person meeting before then. She suggested putting a plan together for the Board's approval at the next meeting on January 6th, and then try to host something between January 6th and 17th. Everyone acknowledged the tight turnaround. Dr. Baker observed how many community members have been participating in recent Board meetings via zoom and suggested having an evening virtual meeting with an administrative overview of budget basics (materials which would be available on the budget pages of the District website for prior review). Dr. Baker, Matt Corrente, Emily Blistein and a few Board members could be present to listen to voter feedback and questions, and then the Committee could perhaps use an AI tool to summarize voter input. This would allow the Board to consider the community input at its January 13th Board meeting.

The Committee agreed on the idea -- aiming for a January 9th Budget Feedback (Q&A) Virtual Meeting. Dr. Baker noted that the January 6th budget presentation before that will have building Principals present to answer specific spending plans at schools (anchored in student performance and strategic plan goals), and the team will also include summary points from the October 22nd Pre-budget Community Input meetings & surveys to illustrate how the proposed FY26 budget attends to those points. She suggested structuring the January 9th meeting as more of a Q&A/listening session. Joanna Doria suggested putting the word out to ACSD voters that THIS is the budget information session, so that folks will know to attend that prior to the Q&A Session on the 9th.

Tricia Allen asked about what should be put out in school newsletters to make sure families know about the opportunities to engage with the budget process. Emily Blistein offered to prepared notices about the plan. Tricia wondered about whether Board approval would be necessary. Dr. Baker said that the Admin team could hold it operationally, much like was done for the October 22nd effort. Board members will be encouraged to attend and listen.

Emily Blistein shared printed copies of a draft C&E plan for the budget in general: activities, materials to be created (FAQs, budget summary documents,), 3 talking points, traditional PR (press release, etc), web/social media, etc. She also provided an overview of the budget website that was done for FY25 so the committee could review which items to duplicate for FY26, and which voter education information to keep.

Dr. Baker suggested having the Board take the opportunity in February to invite a public conversation about education taxes. Emily also emphasized the importance of providing specific information about tax rates so voters can understand how the budget will impact them. Dr. Baker also mentioned the need for principals and board members to talk to people around the community about the District's priorities and budget plan to support those priorities.

Jan 6 -- Complete informational presentation on the FY26 Budget

Jan 9 -- Virtual Public Input Session

Jan 17 -- Dr. Baker on Dan Sharpe's MCTV show to discuss education spending and FY26 budget

Early Feb -- Dr. Baker's Op-Ed "What a Different 4 months Makes...." to bring the process full circle

There was some discussion about whether the C&E Committee wanted to record an interview with MCTV for broadcast in February (to record in late Jan/early Feb). This was done last year, but was never broadcast b/c the state had changed the education funding rules, rendering the Committee's MCTV recording outdated. Tricia Allen expressed a willingness to do this again if needed. Dr. Baker also indicated that all Addison County superintendents have been meeting with state legislators to discuss the budgeting in the broader context of education funding in VT. The Bottom line: we do the right thing, stand on the right thing, and do the best to help voters understand and support the decisions that the District has made.

Joanna summarized the points to highlight in a MCTV message: the budget target, the obligation to avoid the spending threshold, the way the budget building process is grounded in student outcome, and most importantly: that last year was an outlier and everyone is working together to fix that.

The group discussed which information to include on the budget webpage -- including the Picus Report, Strategic Plan, and other supporting information that is influencing ACSD's targeted equity supports. Laura Harthan requested having a readily accessible link to the Budget page, from both the District's and Board's landing pages. Emily will also include it in the "Latest News" part of the website.

Dr. Baker noted the opportunity to provide information about the block budgeting with price tag/student details so that there is transparency around how resources are allocated and distributed across the District. Joanna Doria also requested that the group put care into the information that is provided to Towns for their reports -- voters really rely on this information, so it should not be an afterthought.

There was also some discussion about how student opportunities are classified in the block budgeting, and the specific efforts that have been made to improve fairness and access to student opportunities among all of the District schools.

2. Additional Committee Meetings on 1/7 and 1/14

Tricia Allen revisited the C&E Committee's meeting schedule in light of the budget timeline. The group agreed on January 7th, and moving forward with beginning to advertise the virtual public input meeting on January 9th (6:30 p.m.).

Tricia also mentioned the need to think about compiling content for the quarterly newsletter in February. She will add this to the agenda for the Jan 7th C&E Meeting. Emily Blistein agreed that the quarterly newsletter can wait until mid-Feb so that it can contain all the budget information. Tricia is aiming to get the content for that finished by end of Jan so it can be approved by the full board before being distributed.

Laura Harthan suggested reaching out to Town Clerks to help advertise the January 6th and 9th budget info and input opportunities. Emily agreed and also suggested reaching out to all ACSD PTOs to help spread the word.

3. Quarterly Newsletter Outline/Brainstorm

(Briefly discussed above and will be covered in more detail at January 7th C&E Meeting.)

4. MCTV Spots and Outreach Materials

E. Public Comment

No public comment.

F. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 5:33 p.m.

Motion to adjourn.

Move: Laura Harthan Second: Tricia Allen Status: Passed

*Public Comment Guidelines:

Public comments are encouraged and welcome at each regular board meeting during the period designated for public comment. Comments are limited to three minutes per person. Citizens will be called to make their statement by the board chair. Public comments regarding personnel, students or legal matters will not be heard by the Board.