

Seymour Board of Education



REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

January 13, 2025
Seymour Middle School
7:00 pm

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Chris Champagne, Chairperson
Stephan Behuniak, Secretary
Ed Strumello
Jay Hatfield
Lori Nespoli
Kristen Harmeling

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT: Jim Garofolo
Kristen Bruno, Vice Chairperson

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE: Dr. Susan Compton, Superintendent of Schools
Shannon Levey, Board Clerk
Salvatore Bucci
Jim Freund
Paul Lucke
Stephanie Ciccone
Keith O'Rourke
David Olechna
Dr. Kris Boyle
Annmarie Drugonis, First Selectwoman

I. CALL TO ORDER

A. Pledge of Allegiance

1. Chris Champagne called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

B. Moment of Silence for Anthony "Tony" LoPresti

1. Ed Strumello shared a few words in remembrance of Mr. LoPresti, a former principal and dedicated educator. Mr. Fred Stanek recalled that when Mr. Lopresti became principal in 1970, Mr. Stanek was a sophomore at Seymour High School. Tony was deeply beloved, known for his gentleness, kindness, and the way he treated everyone as if they were his own. Mr. Stanek noted that Tony passed away on December 9th, and the community greatly misses him. Mr. Strumello also highlighted Tony's pride in Seymour High School and his lasting connection to the Boston area, as evidenced by his Boston accent, which remained strong even 50 years later.

C. Introductions

II. BOARD AND ADMINISTRATIVE COMMUNICATIONS

A. [Bungay Building Committee Update](#) – Fred Stanek and Pete Kubik

1. Mr. Stanek provided an update on the Bungay building project, noting that it will cost less to build a new school—nearly half a million dollars less—than previously anticipated. Both the committee and the Board of Selectmen (BOS) have voted to move forward with the project. The referendum is scheduled for October 9th, although the final amount has not yet been determined. A committee meeting is scheduled for tomorrow night to continue discussions. The estimated cost to build the new school is approximately \$58 million. The final amount will be determined in consultation with the Board of Finance and the BOS. The district would need to bond \$24 million. Mr. Kubik reiterated that the district is expected to receive a 66% reimbursement for the project. Once the details are finalized, the proposal will be presented to the public to vote on. The current school will be demolished, and new athletic fields will be constructed. Transportation will also be positively impacted with new ingress and egress routes. Mr. Strumello expressed support for building a new school, stating that it would result in far less disruption to students and their learning. He emphasized that renovating the existing building could incur additional costs and complications. He stressed the importance of garnering support from all sectors of the town, not just Bungay, to ensure the project is supported with the best interest of both the students and the Seymour community. Dr. Compton highlighted the opportunity to create a 21st-century learning environment and thanked the First Selectwoman and the committee for their leadership and hard work on the project. Mr. Stanek concluded by noting that further updates will be shared, and the committee will continue to seek support for the project to benefit the children of Seymour.

B. Seymour Champion Recognitions – “Motivated”

1. Bungay School
 - a. Nicholas Moore
 - b. Colton McMurray
 - i. Absent – will be honored at next month’s meeting
2. Chatfield-LoPresti School
 - a. Brandon Barber
 - b. Carter Crespo
 - c. Trenton O’Reggio
3. Seymour Middle School
 - a. Thomas Halligan
 - b. Isabella Melendez
4. Seymour High School
 - a. Ellie Savary
5. Recognitions
 - a. [Jim Freund](#) – Retiring SHS Principal
 - i. Mr. Champagne read the Resolution recognizing Mr. Freund’s retirement from Seymour High School. The Resolution will be voted on and presented to him in honor of his retirement. Congratulations were extended to Mr. Freund. Mr. Freund expressed his gratitude, speaking from the heart and acknowledging that his success was not his own, but the result of the hard work and dedication of the students and staff. Dr. Compton shared a few words about their collaborative working relationship, noting how it has grown and strengthened, particularly after the Board of Education office was moved from Bank Street to Seymour High School.

C. Student Reports

1. SHS Student Representative Report – Kaitlyn Hamilton, Jeremy Tomasheski

a. Jeremy's Report

- Jeremy reported that the National Honor Society assisted the middle school with their debate tournaments, with additional support from the Student Council.
- He also highlighted Spirit Week, which took place before the winter break.
- Jeremy provided an update on winter sports, recognizing the athletes and their recent accomplishments.

b. Kaitlin's Report

- Kaitlin shared updates from various student clubs:
 - The Hope Club created motivational posters.
 - The KinderKats (a senior group working with Kindergarten students) organized winter-themed activities.
 - The Yearbook Club is working on projects together.
 - The Art Club is collaborating on a puzzle piece project.
 - The Spanish Club hosted a food-tasting event to celebrate the holidays.
 - The Performing Arts groups are continuing their practice sessions.
 - The Newspaper Club is preparing for their next issue, set to be published in March.
 - The Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA) are focusing on securing sponsorships for their activities.

III. PUBLIC COMMENT

Public Comment provides the opportunity for the public to make a comment. It is not a dialogue between the Board and the public. Based upon what is heard during Public Comment, the Board may choose to add a topic to the agenda. If questions are posed that the Chairperson is able to answer, those questions may be addressed under the Chairperson's Comments portion of the agenda. The Board will not discuss personnel matters. Comments should be respectful and no longer than 3 minutes in length so that all who wish to comment may have the opportunity to do so. All the public wanting to comment will need to state their name and address for the record prior to addressing the Board.

1. Annmarie Drugonis, First Selectwoman (111 Middle Benham Rd.)
 - Annmarie announced a Charter Revision meeting scheduled for January 27th at 7:00 PM at the Drummer Meeting House. She encouraged the Board and all residents to provide input on potential changes to the town charter. She also mentioned that high school representatives should be present at the meeting to learn about how town governments operate. Annmarie shared that a Winter/Spring sports pep rally is being planned, which will include an auditorium as a venue for the event (she is still looking for an auditorium to utilize).
2. Michael McKierney (72 Mountain Rd.)
 - Michael extended his thanks to Dr. Compton and the staff for hosting the meet-and-greet for the Boys and Girls State participants. He clarified that the event was not held by the VFW and expressed that the meeting went well, with students gaining valuable insights. Michael also mentioned the upcoming 10th anniversary of the Veterans Concert, scheduled for April 26th at Seymour Middle School. He noted the recent loss of long-time member Tommy Gabinelli. He asked to reach out to Chris Cummings and Gera Ciocca regarding the 4th grade Veterans Day presentation, acknowledging that CLS has done a fantastic job with this event in recent years and would like to make it even better. Michael suggested naming the park across from the community center after "Chusetown," the original name of Seymour. He expressed his desire to get involved with Chatfield School's Book Buddies program, with several veterans interested. He also shared a flyer for the "Sage of the Four Chaplains" tribute. He offered his condolences for the passing of Tony LoPresti, a former student, recalling their good relationship.
3. Fred Stanek (22 North Benham Rd.)
 - Fred publicly congratulated Mr. Jim Freund for his outstanding work at Seymour High School, particularly in advancing the curriculum and quality of instruction. He praised the collaborative

efforts between Mr. Freund and Paul Lucke. Fred expressed his hope for Seymour High School to achieve Blue Ribbon status in the next five years, noting that the school has the potential to meet the criteria. He wished Mr. Freund well in his retirement and extended his best wishes to Mr. Lucke for the future.

- Public comment was called three times and then closed.

IV. REPORTS

A. FBLA Club – Sponsorships

1. Presenters: Sara Folsom, Senior, President, Ariana Alvarez, Junior, Treasurer, Other FBLA officers
2. Overview: The FBLA Club presented to the Board seeking support for obtaining sponsorships. Their goal is to secure sponsorships to help fund participation in national conferences and take the club to the next level. FBLA (Future Business Leaders of America) provides unique opportunities for students to expand their knowledge and enhance their personal and professional growth. The club explained the "Champion Chapter" recognition, which includes Gold, Silver, and Bronze levels based on specific requirements. Currently, the club does not hold any of these statuses but is aiming to achieve them. The key to earning recognition and funding participation in national conferences is securing sponsorships at the national, state, and local levels. FBLA members have earned top-three placements in competitions, making them eligible to attend national conferences.
3. Benefits of sponsorships: include real-world application, competitive registration, community involvement, and promoting school pride.
4. The club is having some success with "on-the-spot" sponsorships, but the current process takes time. So, they are seeking a more streamlined approval process. They proposed moving sponsorship approval to the administrative level to speed up the process.
5. Discussion: Mr. Champagne asked about the difference between donations for clubs and sports. Mr. Lucke explained that in the past, sponsorships had to be approved by the Board, which created delays and caused the club to miss out on opportunities. He proposed creating separate accounts for each club and allowing the administrative team to handle approvals. Clubs would still submit a memo to the Board for transparency. Emily Jepson clarified that the club receives some support from sports, such as transportation, but the amount is insufficient to cover expenses like national conference fees. The club will provide written documentation, including thank-you letters and formal letters from businesses, to ensure a transparent paper trail for monetary donations. The difference between sports and clubs is that sports have parent clubs that can accept donations because they are nonprofit entities, while FBLA does not have this option. Dr. Compton noted that the Board and Superintendent's backing is necessary for this process. They will consult with the Board's attorney to determine the best course of action. The issue will be included on the February 3rd agenda for further discussion and potential approval. Ms. Harmeling suggested reviewing the district's policies regarding sponsorships and donations.

B. Enrollment Report

C. Food Services Report – Cindy Brooks

D. Special Education Report – Dr. Boyle

E. Financial Report – Salvator Bucci

V. CONSENT AGENDA

A. Approval of Minutes

1. Finance Committee Meeting – December 9, 2024
2. Regular BOE Meeting – December 9, 2024
3. Special BOE Meeting – December 16, 2024
4. Special BOE Meeting – January 9, 2025

B. Hiring – Non-Certified

1. [Carol Sejdija](#)
 - a. Food Services
 - b. Seymour High School
 - c. Replacing Nisha Moktan

MOTION: move to approve the consent agenda as presented (Mr. Behuniak / sec. Mr. Kubik)

AFFIRMATIVE: Mr. Champagne, Mr. Behuniak, Mr. Kubik, Mr. Strumello, Mr. Hatfield, Ms. Harmeling, Ms. Nespoli

PASSES: 7-0-0

VI. ITEMS REMOVED FROM CONSENT AGENDA

VII. DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION

- A. [Resolution](#) Honoring Jim Freund, retiring Principal of Seymour High School
MOTION: to approve the resolution as presented (Mr. Behuniak / sec. Mr. Kubik)
AFFIRMATIVE: Mr. Champagne, Mr. Behuniak, Mr. Kubik, Mr. Strumello, Mr. Hatfield, Ms. Harmeling, Ms. Nespoli
PASSES: 7-0-0
- B. [SPS District 2025-2026 calendar](#)
 - a. Dr. Compton reviewed the results of an informal survey conducted with surrounding districts regarding the timing of April break. The responses were mixed. In addition, a poll of district staff showed that 51.6% preferred the break from April 13-17, while 48.4% favored April 6-10. Dr. Compton expressed disappointment that Connecticut does not have a unified spring break across districts. However, she assured the Board that the administration has done its due diligence and followed through with the Board's requests. Ms. Kristen Harmeling stated that since the staff was surveyed, the district should honor the preference of the majority. Mr. Champagne added that the Professional Development (PD) days have been updated to Thursdays as part of the changes, as requested.
MOTION: to accept calendar A as presented in the board packet (Ms. Harmeling/ sec. Mr. Kubik)
AFFIRMATIVE: Mr. Champagne, Mr. Behuniak, Mr. Kubik, Mr. Strumello, Mr. Hatfield, Ms. Harmeling, Ms. Nespoli
PASSES: 7-0-0
 - b. Dr. Compton addressed the scheduling of the two days before the Christmas break that Mr. Hatfield brought up, noting that the district had followed the approach taken by other schools in the area. Mr. Hatfield suggested that the Board consider the calendar for the following year, particularly the productivity around school breaks. He proposed the possibility of having a two-week break. Dr. Compton responded that the timing of breaks depends on where the holidays fall each year. Mr. Champagne pointed out that extending the break would push back the last day of school. Mr. Hatfield noted that the pattern of fewer snow days may result in an earlier end to the school year, which could make a longer break more feasible. Ms. Harmeling questioned if the union had reviewed the current calendar and did not raise any concerns, they have, suggesting that they are likely fine with the existing schedule. Dr. Compton shared that she had studied several years of the Seymour school calendar and noted significant variation from year to year. Ms. Nespoli commented that a gradual return to school after a break can be beneficial for students, making the transition smoother.
- C. Donation – Monetary donation from Barbara Ford and the Class of 1974
 - a. **MOTION:** to accept the donation from Barbara Ford and class of 1974 and direct the Superintendent to distribute the donation as she sees appropriate. (Mr. Strumello / sec. Mr. Behuniak)
AFFIRMATIVE: Mr. Champagne, Mr. Behuniak, Mr. Kubik, Mr. Strumello, Mr. Hatfield, Ms. Harmeling, Ms. Nespoli
PASSES: 7-0-0
- D. [Education Tuition Agreement](#)

- a. Dr. Compton – this is an on going agreement that Dr. Boyle and Mr. Freund have worked on.
MOTION: to approve the tuition agreement between Seymour and Oxford (Mr. Behuniak / sec. Mr. Kubik)
AFFIRMATIVE: Ms. Harmeling, Mr. Behuniak, Mr. Hatfield, Mr. Kubik
OPPOSED: Mr. Strumello, Ms. Nespoli
OBSTAIN: Mr. Champagne
PASSES: 4-2-1
- b. Ed Strumello raised a question regarding the difference in tuition costs between the towns. Chris Champagne responded that there has been no discussion of an even swap. Stephan Behuniak explained that the tuition costs are based on per-pupil spending, which is why Oxford's tuition is higher than Seymour's. The Board expressed their dissatisfaction with the current cost disparity. It was noted that two students are attending Oxford, while one is attending Seymour. Ed Strumello voiced his concerns about the cost differential and indicated that he would vote no on the matter. Dr. Compton clarified that, by law, the district is required to pay the tuition. Kristen Harmeling explained the Connecticut statute that mandates districts pay tuition costs even when they are greater in the other district, as is the case with Oxford. She noted that there is nothing that can be done about this discrepancy until the students graduate.

VIII. INFORMATION

- A. Name the Park Essay Contest Winners
 - 1. First place – Aleksandra Czerwony, SHS
 - 2. Second place – Mackenzie Blood, SMS
 - a. They will come in February to be recognized. The town will announce it formally.
- B. Increasing Educator Diversity [Plan Approved](#)
- C. [Multicultural Festival](#) – volunteers needed
- D. Hiring – Appendix D
 - 1. Allen Aldrich
 - a. Tardy Officer
 - b. Seymour High School
 - c. Replacing Stephanie Ciccone
- E. Hiring – Non-Certified
 - 2. Sungok Hong
 - a. Instructional Paraeducator
 - b. Chatfield-LoPresti School
 - c. Replacing Ellen Cedia
- F. Resignations –
 - 1. Kristen Harmeling noted that some of the resignations submitted are actually retirements. Dr. Compton expressed her gratitude to those staff members who are retiring, acknowledging their contributions to the district. Mr. Hatfield complimented the retirement letters, describing them as "classy" and expressing how nice it was to read them. Dr. Compton shared that some teachers have been emotional when submitting their retirement letters, highlighting the deep connection they have with the district. Mr. Strumello agreed with the sentiments expressed, adding that he also appreciated the well-written retirement letters.
 - 2. Lorena Snell
 - a. Volleyball Coach
 - b. Seymour Middle School
 - c. Effective immediately
 - 3. [Lisa Cheney](#)
 - a. English Teacher
 - b. Seymour High School
 - c. Effective end of 24-25 school year
 - 4. [Paul O'Connor](#)

- a. Physical Education/Health Teacher
- b. Seymour High School
- c. Effective end of 24-25 school year
- 5. [Greg Spath](#)
 - a. Math Teacher
 - b. Seymour High School
 - c. Effective end of 24-25 school year
- 6. [Mark Angeletti](#)
 - a. Paraeducator
 - b. Seymour High School
 - c. Effective January 6, 2025
- 7. [Stacey Long](#)
 - a. Assistant Principal
 - b. Bungay Elementary School
 - c. Effective February 7, 2025

G. School Events

- 1. [Chatfield-LoPresti School](#)
- 2. [Bungay Elementary School](#)
- 3. [Seymour Middle School](#)
- 4. [Seymour High School](#)

IX. BOARD OF EDUCATION COMMENTS & SUPERINTENDENT REPORT

A. Board of Education Comments

- 1. Chairman's Comments
 - a. The Chairman thanked Mr. Freund for his service and wished him the best of luck in his retirement.
- 2. Board Member Comments
 - a. Stephan Behuniak thanked Mr. Freund for his leadership and contributions to the district. Ed Strumello stated that he would add Mr. Freund to the lunch list for retired Seymour principals. Kristen Harmeling tearfully thanked Mr. Freund, particularly for his support during the challenging COVID period, and praised his fortitude and wisdom. Lori Nespoli recognized the Seymour Middle School Cheerleaders for their accomplishments, including placing third at the Swift Middle School competition, as well as receiving the "Katie's Kindness Award" and the Judges' Choice Award. She highlighted a moment of unity, where teams from Seymour and Oxford sat together, emphasizing the success of the Kindness initiative. Pete Kubik wished Mr. Freund the best of luck in retirement and expressed confidence that Mr. Lucke would continue to carry the torch. Jay Hatfield thanked Mr. Freund for his tremendous leadership, acknowledging that it wasn't always easy but he was always dedicated. Mr. Freund addressed the Board, explaining that retiring was not an easy decision. He noted that he had stayed one year beyond the state's retirement requirement, which actually resulted in a financial loss. He assured the Board that he would remain engaged with the community, continue attending athletic events, and serve as an emergency administrator, remaining "just a phone call away."

B. Superintendent's Report

- 1. The Assistant Principal positions have been posted, and applications are being reviewed. Committees will be formed to assist with the process, and Board members are invited to participate. The goal is to finalize the hiring process by the last week of January, with an announcement planned for February 3rd. There has been a strong response to the postings,

with a wide variety of applicants. The postings have been made both internally and externally. Dr. Compton encouraged Board members to stop by and review the applications. Dr. Compton reminded everyone of the second budget working session scheduled for January 14th at 6:00 PM, where needs assessments will be reviewed. The meeting will take place in the conference room, while the Bungay Building Committee will meet in the Superintendent's office.

X. SUPERINTENDENT PERFORMANCE EVALUATION FOLLOW UP/CONTRACT

A. Discussion and possible action concerning the employment, performance, and evaluation of the Superintendent of Schools (may be discussed in Executive Session)

MOTION: to enter into executive session invite Dr. Susan Compton (Mr. Behuniak / sec. Mr. Kubik) 7-0-0

AFFIRMATIVE: Mr. Champagne, Mr. Behuniak, Mr. Kubik, Mr. Strumello, Mr. Hatfield, Ms. Harmeling, Ms. Nespoli

PASSES: 7-0-0

Entered Executive Session at 8:27 PM.

Exited Executive Session at 9:05 PM.

XI. POSSIBLE ACTION AFTER EXECUTIVE SESSION

C. Discussion and possible action on the Superintendent's Contract

MOTION: to accept the contract of the Superintendent as presented with the exception of updating section 6G from 4 personal days to 9. (Mr. Kubik / sec. Mr. Hatfield)

AFFIRMATIVE: Mr. Champagne, Mr. Behuniak, Mr. Kubik, Mr. Strumello, Mr. Hatfield, Ms. Harmeling, Ms. Nespoli

PASSES: 7-0-0

XII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 9:06 PM.

YouTube Link (1/13/2025): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CpHziruY_ZM

Note: The next Regular Board of Education meeting will be held on **Monday, February 3, 2025, at 7:00 pm in Seymour High School.**