

LYME-OLD LYME SCHOOLS

Regional School District #18

A Private School Experience



in a Public School Setting

Regular Board of Education Meeting

March 5, 2025

Board Present: Jason Kemp, Chair; Anna James, Vice Chair; Christopher Staab, Treasurer; Martha Shoemaker, Secretary; Scott Brown; Laura Dean-Frazier; Susan Fogliano; Gavin Lodge; Alexander Lowry

Administration Present: Ian Neviaser, Superintendent of Schools; Mark Ambruso, Principal of Lyme-Old Lyme Middle School; Michelle Dean, Director of Curriculum; Melissa Dougherty, Director of Special Services; Kelly Enoch, Principal of Mile Creek School; Allison Hine, Principal of Lyme Consolidated School; Sean Kennedy, Assistant Principal of Mile Creek School; Holly McCalla, Business Manager; Jeanne Manfredi, Assistant Principal of Lyme-Old Lyme High School; Ron Turner, Director of Facilities & Technology; Noah Ventola, Assistant Principal of Lyme-Old Lyme Middle School; James Wygonik, Principal of Lyme-Old Lyme High School

Others Present: Heather Saia, RETA Co-President; Chloe Datum and Ada LaConti, High School Student Representatives; 15 community members from LOL

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m. by Chair Jason Kemp. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

II. Consent Agenda

1. Approval of Minutes

MOTION: Mrs. James made a motion, which was seconded by Mr. Lowry, to approve the minutes of Regular Meeting and Special Meeting of February 5, 2025 as presented.

VOTE: the Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

III. Visitors

1. Students from Mile Creek School

49 Lyme Street, Old Lyme, Connecticut 06371

T: 860-434-7238 F: 860-434-9959 E: neviaseri@region18.org www.region18.org

Erin Kennedy, 3rd Grade Teacher at Mile Creek School, and several students gave a presentation on their efforts on the Mile Creek newsletter, the *Wildcat Times*.

2. Report from Student Representatives

Chloe Datum and Ada LaConti reported on the following activities taking place at the schools:

At LOLHS: February was a very exciting month at LOLHS. Members of the band and chorus traveled to England and Wales to improve their performance skills and collaborate with their British peers. They played with the Royal Marine Band, a rare experience, and also performed with the Brentwood Youth Imperial Band. The Wildcats are having some great winter seasons, with boys basketball and girls indoor track winning the shoreline championships. At the New England indoor track competition, Chase Gilbert placed 1st in the one mile, and Zoe Eastman-Grossel came in 5th in the 300m. We wish them luck at the national competition. Boys basketball is doing great in the state tournament, winning their game against Hartford Public Schools on March 4 to move on to the quarterfinals. The unified team also had their annual unified vs. staff basketball game, which was a great success. Looking forward to March, Student Council will be hosting a blood drive, the Mock Trial Team will be advancing to the semifinal round and the musical *Newsies* will be performed on the March 13, 14 and 15.

At LOLMS: The middle school kicked off February with a visit from the high school with the 8th graders. High school students and school counselors provided an overview of the high school schedule, course selection process, and gave insight into the daily life of a LOLHS student. The 7th and 8th grade band students had the exciting opportunity to join the high school for a "Battle of the Bands" performance, and the MathCounts team traveled to UConn to compete against schools from across the state. Winter sports wrapped up successful seasons, and we're now looking forward to the start of spring sports as the weather warms up. February recess provided both students and staff with a well-deserved break as we head into the long March stretch. To wrap up the month, the PTO hosted a fun-filled activity night with over 30 parent volunteers and approximately 150 students in attendance. Meanwhile, the musical cast and crew are ramping up their rehearsals in preparation for their big March performance.

At Lyme Consolidated School and Mile Creek School: Both schools have been celebrating Read Across America Week with various activities and visits from other schools and from community members. We have also begun to collaborate with LOLMS and LYSB to plan various transitional activities for the fifth-grade students as they gear up for their first year of middle school. Along with various activities in the elementary schools, we have visits from LOLMS staff and administration, a field trip down to the Middle School, and a program designed and implemented by the LYSB called *Gearing Up for Middle School*. At Lyme School, auditions have taken place and rehearsals are underway for the 5th grade musical. The musical this year is *Phantom of the Music Room* and will be performed for the students and the wider school community on April 10. The PTO is organizing an amazing Arts Night that will take place on April 3. It will feature a display of student artwork as well as a presentation by the Tanglewood Marionettes of Cinderella. At Mile Creek School, the 5th grade musical is *Frozen* and will be performed on April 9. The PTO began ACE, the afterschool enrichment program. On March 3, all students worked with the Treehouse Players as part of the celebration of Read Across America Week.

In the Preschool Program: February was a busy month at the preschool. We started the month by learning about shadows and predicted whether or not the groundhog would see his shadow. We practiced our fine motor skills in a friendship cardmaking workshop and exchanged special cards with all our friends at school. We wrapped up the month by learning to identify and describe the different kinds of emotions that we feel. On March 4, we will welcome the Connecticut Audubon Society to the preschool. Audubon staff will teach us a lesson about the power of plants and we will plant seeds, which we will watch grow in our classrooms. In March, we are looking forward to the study of space. We will learn about the planets in the solar system, visit the International Space Station via YouTube, and learn about astronauts. The shape of the month is the diamond, the color is white, and Jennifer Sanchez is the artist of the month.

3. Public Comment

Mary Powell St. Louis addressed the Board of Education expressing concern about proposed cuts to the music department. She emphasized that music education is crucial for student development, teaching discipline, creativity, collaboration, and confidence. Dr. Powell St. Louis stated that many community members share her concerns. She criticized the reduction of 1.0 full-time equivalent (FTE) teacher in the music department, which would lower high school music staffing to around 1.2 FTE, potentially leading to reduced programming. She argued that the claim of "no changes in programming" was misleading as the staffing cuts would likely result in fewer music education options. Dr. Powell St. Louis called on the Board to be transparent with taxpayers and reconsider the decision.

Carmen Oulahan, a Spanish teacher, shared a letter on behalf of her husband, Hector Migliacci, a musical director, expressing support for the music program. She urged the Board to reconsider the proposed cuts. She highlighted the importance of balancing financial responsibility with educational enrichment, emphasizing that arts and music are not luxuries but essential components of a well-rounded education. Ms. Oulahan spoke about the transformative power of music, connecting it to the fields of science, technology and history. She argued that strong music programs are vital for the community's success, property values and school ratings, and that music plays a key role in shaping cognitive, emotional and social development. She urged the Board to maintain funding for music education, noting that a small increase in taxes now would be worth it to preserve the arts, which strengthen the community. Ms. Oulahan also shared personal experiences from living in 12 different countries where music was the common bond that united students across diverse backgrounds, reinforcing the global importance of music in education.

Robert Archbald expressed strong dissatisfaction with the Board of Education's decision to cut music programs. He criticized the district's management, arguing that eliminating music is unacceptable. He noted that while Lyme and Old Lyme are desirable towns, they are not attracting new residents. Mr. Archbald voiced disappointment that the Board, despite its capable members, considered program cuts for students an acceptable solution.

Mona Colwell addressed the Board of Education regarding concerns over the increasing school budget. She compared the current debate over potential music program cuts to a similar controversy in 2019 when

the Region 18 budget included unapproved expenditures while omitting essential items. She criticized the implementation of taxpayer-funded universal prekindergarten, which she claims was never properly approved, and raised concerns over a costly \$60 million renovation proposal in 2021 that was justified by an anticipated population increase that never materialized. Ms. Colwell argued that despite student numbers remaining the same since 2019, administrative expenses have grown unnecessarily, making the district's budget increase a statewide topic of discussion. She urged the Board to reassess all costs to avoid forcing taxpayers to choose between higher taxes and losing valuable programs like music. Ms. Colwell's letter, in its entirety, is attached to these minutes for informational purposes.

Angela Mock expressed deep concern over potential cuts to the music program. She emphasized the significant role music has played in her life and that of her children, highlighting its educational value beyond the arts, including connections to math and science. She credited the strength of the music program as a key factor in choosing the school system. Mrs. Mock acknowledged the need for school building improvements but urged the Board to carefully prioritize spending, warning that losing talented educators could severely impact the district. She underscored the value of music in providing students with enriching experiences, such as a recent trip to England, and strongly opposed cutting arts education, stressing its lasting benefits for students.

Deborah Galasso praised the towns' art and music programs, emphasizing their importance to her family and the community. She highlighted her children's deep involvement in school musicals and the strong sense of family within the music programs. Mrs. Galasso expressed concern over potential cuts, stressing that music is a defining and cherished aspect of the district that sets it apart from neighboring communities.

Kate Scheckwitz, a 6th grader at LOLMS, expressed her strong support for the music program. She emphasized its importance to both students and the community, stating that music is a vital part of their identity. She urged against any reductions, highlighting the program's positive impact and influence.

Sarah Sahl advocated for preserving the district's music program. She emphasized the personal and community-wide importance of music education, describing it as a vital outlet for self-expression and a key reason families choose to live in the district. She expressed concern that cutting the music program would send a message that music is less valued than other programs, particularly athletics, which receive significant financial support. Ms. Sahl questioned the logic of hiring and then immediately letting go of a new music teacher at Mile Creek School, arguing that such decisions could harm the district's reputation and ability to attract educators in the future. She urged the Board to explore alternative cost-saving measures to maintain the continuity of the music program and ensure students continue to appreciate its value from a young age.

Rachael Jungkeit advocated for the music program and its teachers. She shared that her daughter is actively involved in the choral program and musical productions, while her other daughter pursued a music major, crediting the program as invaluable to their development. She expressed concern over teachers being reassigned across buildings, fearing they will be spread too thin, which could weaken the

program. She emphasized that smaller classes, even if they function like independent studies, are crucial for passionate students. She urged the Board to maintain strong support for the program as it provides students with a key motivation to attend school and contributes to their overall happiness and success.

Kathleen Rice, a new resident of Lyme-Old Lyme, expressed her admiration for the district's music program. Having long appreciated the program through her husband's family, she highlighted its lasting positive impact on friendships and personal growth. She shared her excitement about her son's involvement in middle school band and the jazz band, emphasizing how music fosters collaboration rather than competition. Mrs. Rice acknowledged the benefits of athletics but stressed the unique value of music education in teaching students how to create and work together, urging the Board not to overlook its importance.

Sophia Ortoleva, a 2021 graduate of LOLHS, urged the Board of Education to reconsider cuts to the music program. She emphasized that music is more than just a class—it builds confidence and provides crucial mentorship. She shared her personal experience, crediting her success in music, including joining an accomplished a cappella group at Brown University, to the guidance of her chorus teacher, Mrs. Pekar. Sophia highlighted the significant time she spent in the program and the profound impact it had on her development. She warned that stretching one teacher across multiple schools would diminish the quality of mentorship and support for students. Additionally, she expressed concern for Mrs. Pekar's well-being, stressing that teachers also need adequate support. Sophia concluded by urging the Board to ensure that the school maintains a strong and well-supported music program.

Maryellen Basham spoke to the Board of Education about her concerns regarding the Mile Creek School parking lot project. She questioned the \$2.5 million cost, expressing skepticism about whether the new design would effectively address parking overflow or improve the current drop-off and pick-up routine. She noted that the plan does not significantly add parking spaces, and she raised concerns about student safety, emphasizing that the project may not provide a real solution to the existing issues.

Tracie Ortoleva expressed her concerns about reductions in the music program, emphasizing the importance of the arts in fostering creativity, discipline and academic success. She questioned financial priorities, noting the existence of a \$3 million contingency fund while art programs face cuts amid facility upgrades. Mrs. Ortoleva, involved in the district for 15 years, pointed out a decline in state rankings and suggested that reductions in the arts may be a contributing factor. She urged the Board to reconsider, stressing that the community values educational excellence and that sufficient funds exist to sustain the music program.

The Superintendent assured the Board of Education that no music programs were being cut. The district has more music teachers than needed, requiring adjustments similar to those in other subject areas. Teachers cannot be overburdened due to contractual limits on teaching hours and required prep time. The practice of teachers working in multiple buildings is not new and occurs across various departments. The decision is not financially driven but based on staffing needs. Extracurricular activities, such as the

musical, will continue. These are stipend positions and are not mandatory for the music teacher to fill. The Superintendent emphasized that if any negative impact on programming is observed, adjustments will be made. The district remains committed to supporting the arts and education, ensuring that teachers are fairly allocated based on necessity.

Chloe Datum and Ada LaConti, the student reps to the Board, expressed the personal relationship/bond they have with the music staff and possible student concern if teachers were not in the building full-time.

The Board discussed adjusting music teacher allocations due to excess staffing. Despite concerns (staying true to values and character of the towns), the Board emphasized that no music programs are being cut. Teachers currently teach in multiple buildings due to insufficient high school enrollment. The decision is based on a needs-based budget, not financial constraints. Teachers will maintain their contracted workload and prep time. Extracurricular activities will continue, funded by stipends. Enrollment data shows a decline in music participation. The Board assured that the changes will not impact programming and will monitor enrollment closely.

There was consensus to add this as an agenda item to the April Board meeting when the Board will have more data on the music course enrollment numbers for next year.

IV. Correspondence

Mr. Kemp reviewed a summary of the correspondence that the Board received over the last month. The correspondence is attached to the minutes for informational purposes. *The opinions expressed in the attached correspondence are solely those of the authors. They do not purport to reflect the position of the Regional School District #18 Board of Education or its employees.*

Sender	Date	Subject
Tracie Ortoleva	March 2, 2025	Proposed reduction in music/arts.
Mary Lou and Michael Rice	March 3, 2025 March 4, 2025	To express their dismay at the proposed cuts to the music program.

V. Administrative Reports

1. Superintendent's Report

Mr. Neviasser reviewed the March personnel report which reflected the following:

Vacancies 2024-2025	
Instructional Assistants	All Levels
School Nurse Supervisor with School Nurse Duties	Districtwide
Vacancies 2025-2026	
Assistant Principal	LOLHS

4 th Grade Teacher (pending budget approval)	Mile Creek School		
Appointments			
Name	Position	Location	Effective Date
Vicki Griffin	Instructional Assistant	LOLMS	February 24, 2025
Angela Valero	Custodian	LOLHS	February 24, 2025
Cari Jacobsen	Kindergarten Teacher (long-term substitute)	Mile Creek School	March 26, 2025

Mr. Neviasser reviewed the March enrollment report which reflected a total of 1,274 students in-house, a decrease of six students from last month this time.

Mr. Neviasser gave an update on the progress towards the district goals.

Curriculum

Utilize Panorama to track and monitor progress across all domains in order to make informed decisions about individual student programming.

Met with area consultant on providing more personalized professional development in March.

Human Resources

In alignment with state guidelines, implement the newly created Region 18 Educator Support Plan and gather feedback on the process to inform any plan revisions for year two.

Collected more survey responses.

Community

In order to streamline communication to our students and families, evaluate school and district processes to determine the most efficient and effective methods of disseminating information.

Finalizing next edition of *Focus on Education* newsletter.

Facilities

In preparation for construction to begin, develop strategies to minimize classroom disruption, adhere to the approved budget and design, and continue to maintain existing facilities via the five-year plan.

Completed first round of progress payment submissions; finalizing all GMP's; construction continues at all schools.

Sustainability

Maintain and expand "Green Teams" at each building to identify, address, and support student, staff and community-driven sustainability initiatives.

Center School: Students will learn about the planet Earth and how it is the only livable planet in the solar system. Students brainstormed different ways that people can protect and help Earth,

such as recycling, conservation and reducing waste. In classrooms, students implemented these practices by recycling and conserving resources, including electricity and water.

LOLHS: Worked with members of Old Lyme Open Space to clear a new trail. Battery recycling is moving forward. Collection buckets will be placed toward the front of the commons; weights will be recorded and reviewed at the end of the school year. MS Wellness Day on April 11: High school students will design and run 4R/being green workshop. Help design new trash/recycling bins at Lyme School, Curiosity Shop volunteers, event at Long Table Farm.

Lyme School: Green Team is starting the work of designing new recycling and garbage receptacles. They are looking into the possibility of partnering with LOLHS students in the graphic design part of this work.

Mile Creek School: Green Team will be visiting the Audubon Society to learn about their bluebird habitats and will be creating similar bird houses for Mile Creek. The TREX initiative continues.

LOLMS: Maintaining the worm farm and plants in the greenhouse as well as learning about what Earth Day is about. Hiked to Champlain North Preserve where we introduced the topic of an Earth Day celebration. Students decided to give away tree seedlings and wrote a grant for the supplies. The Old Lyme Land Trust's Board of Trustees voted unanimously to fully approve the grant as proposed, and plans are underway to prepare saplings for Earth Day.

Board of Education

Attend professional development opportunities offered through CAFE including the CAFE/CAPSS Convention and other statewide board of education activities.

No new updates.

2. Business Manager's Report

Mrs. McCalla reviewed the Executive Budget Summary as of February 28, 2025. Fluctuations of note: While there are varied fluctuations among line items, compared to last year the percent to budget for total district spending is flat to last year. As previously reported, Special Education overage is based upon student need and stipulated financial obligations. There will be known additional expenditures for Special Education tuition and transportation in the amount of \$51,405 taking that total line spending to 120% to budget. Of note: Support Services is over budget due to contract for nursing services to cover for an extended medical leave. As previously indicated, Administrative Services is mainly due to the builder's risk insurance policies for the four-school project that the Board approved at December's meeting.

	2024-2025 Received YTD
Town of Old Lyme	\$18,178,927
Town of Lyme	\$4,101,183

Mrs. McCalla reviewed the Contingency Maintenance Report: \$49,875 was spent due to repairing/reinforcing the integrity of a drainage basin in the Lyme School parking lot. Balance stands at \$129,223.

VI. Educational Presentation

There was no presentation scheduled this month.

VII. Chairman & Committee Reports:

- a. Facilities.* Mr. Staab reported that this committee met earlier in the evening and discussed the condition of Center School and the Middle School. The auditorium lighting at LOLMS is definitely in need of repair/replacement and will be addressed.
- b. Finance.* No report.
- c. Communications.* Mrs. Dean-Frazier reported that Bridget Compagno, Director of Communications and Marketing, has created a page on the district's website which gives an overview of the various means of communications (district, school, classroom) and how to stay informed (<https://www.region18.org/district-information/communications>). She is also working on an instructional video for using ParentSquare.
- d. Policy.* Mrs. James reported that a federal district court ruled that the 2024 Title IX Regulations are invalid and must be set aside. Due to the ruling, the district will transition back to the 2020 Title IX policy. Once legal counsel submits that previous version, it will be reviewed by the committee. Also, at their last meeting, the committee reviewed a policy on *institutional neutrality*, which provides boards guidance on posting position statements that take stances on a variety of significant local, national and world events.
- e. LEARN.* No report.
- f. LOL Prevention Coalition.* No report.
- g. PreK-8 Building Committee.*

Mrs. Fogliano gave the following update on the work of this committee:

Construction continues to progress well, now in all four of the affected schools.

For the three HVAC schools (Center School, Lyme School and Middle School), Downes Construction is moving through all the phases of each school as scheduled (if not ahead), doing abatement where needed, installing ductwork and control devices, all in preparation for rooftop units to be placed during April vacation. We are still anticipating commissioning of the HVAC systems in summer, as well as work on the security vestibules.

February vacation was particularly busy at Mile Creek School. The construction trailer was installed, the construction fencing was completed, trees were removed where the addition will go, the site was graded, and we anticipate concrete footings for the addition will go in this week. The temporary electrical switchgear was installed, which will power the construction work and the addition itself until the permanent switchgear is ready for installation.

On Monday, March 3, the Building Committee met for an additional time to expedite the last few bids received on the Mile Creek portion of the project. Those bids are part of our BOE agenda for your approval.

The Building Committee is pleased to report that the fire suppression bid for the sprinkler system in the addition came in very favorably, at \$72,000, from a reputable subcontractor well known to Downes.

Also, at Monday's meeting, after an extremely careful review of the overall \$57.5 million project budget and based on actual Guaranteed Maximum Pricing, the Building Committee approved the Mile Creek School sitework alternate bids #7, 10 and 11. These bids include the improved traffic and bus loops for Mile Creek School, as well as the additional parking at that site.

After our initial bids came in so high, we moved that particular portion of the Mile Creek School project to an "alternate," meaning we were not certain at the time that it could be accomplished. It is very good news that the Building Committee feels confident that we can include this work within budget.

While we can make no guarantees, it is possible that we may not need to use as much of the District's Undesignated Fund for the security vestibule work at the three HVAC schools as we thought. The Administration and the Building Committee and Downes are being conservative, as we must be prepared for any surprises that construction may bring, but we are hopeful.

As Chair of the Committee, I want to extend my most sincere thanks to Alan Scheiness, Lyme's Board of Finance Chair and stalwart member of the Building Committee, who ruthlessly crunched the numbers along with the Superintendent and the construction firm, giving us a very clear sense of our fiscal abilities within the budget set at referendum.

Ian Neviaser, Ron Turner, Brian Howe and our building administrators also deserve kudos for consistent oversight of the work and coordination of the construction teams within each building to accommodate programming.

While there have been some frustrating moments with both the construction firm and the architects in the past, both have stepped up in recent weeks to expedite the changes needed to Lyme and Mile Creek fire suppression systems. They have responded rapidly and with an eye to efficiency and containing costs.

Please feel free to reach out to me with your questions and those of any members of the public.

VIII. New Business

1. Healthy Food Certification

Mrs. McCalla explained the following:

Vote 1: Required vote for participation in healthy food option of HFC. This vote is required for all boards of education that participate in the NSLP. Each board must vote "yes" or "no" to participate in the healthy food option of C.G.S. Section 10-215f and follow the Connecticut Nutrition Standards (CNS). The

motion and board-approved meeting minutes must include the exact motion language provided.

Vote 2: Required vote for food exemptions for boards of education choosing healthy food option of HFC. This vote is required for all boards that vote "yes" to participate in the healthy food option. The motion and board-approved meeting minutes must reflect a "yes" or "no" vote to allow food exemptions using the exact motion language provided.

MOTION: Mrs. Shoemaker made the following motion, which was seconded by Mr. Lodge: Pursuant to C.G.S. Section 10-215f, the Regional School District #18 Board of Education certifies that all food items offered for sale to students in the schools under its jurisdiction, and not exempted from the Connecticut Nutrition Standards published by the Connecticut State Department of Education, will comply with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards during the period of July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2026. This certification shall include all food offered for sale to students separately from reimbursable meals at all times and from all sources, including but not limited to school stores, vending machines, school cafeterias, culinary programs, and any fundraising activities on school premises sponsored by the school or non-school organizations and groups.

VOTE: the Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

MOTION: Mr. Lodge made the following motion, which was seconded by Mrs. Dean-Frazier: the Regional School District #18 Board of Education will allow the sale to students of food items that do not meet the Connecticut Nutrition Standards and beverages not listed in Section 10-221q of the Connecticut General Statutes provided that the following conditions are met: 1) the sale is in connection with an event occurring after the end of the regular school day or on the weekend; 2) the sale is at the location of the event; and 3) the food and beverage items are not sold from a vending machine or school store. An "event" is an occurrence that involves more than just a regularly scheduled practice, meeting, or extracurricular activity. For example, soccer games, school plays, and interscholastic debates are events but soccer practices, play rehearsals, and debate team meetings are not. The "regular school day" is the period from midnight before to 30 minutes after the end of the official school day. "Location" means where the event is being held and must be the same place as the food and beverage sales.

VOTE: the Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

2. Approval of Mile Creek School Sprinkler System

Mr. Neviasser explained, as reported in Mrs. Fogliano's Building Committee report, that the fire suppression bid for the sprinkler system in the addition at Mile Creek School came in very favorably, at \$72,000 from a reputable subcontractor well known to Downes Construction. The Building Committee voted unanimously to approve this bid.

MOTION: Mrs. Shoemaker made a motion, which was seconded by Mr. Staab, to approve the bid for the Mile Creek School project (fire suppression) as presented in the letter of authorization dated March 3, 2025.

VOTE: the Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

3. Approval of Mile Creek School Parking Lot Alternate

Mr. Neviasser reported that at the Building Committee meeting on March 3, after an extremely careful review of the overall \$57.5 million project budget and based on actual Guaranteed Maximum Pricing, the Building Committee approved the Mile Creek School sitework alternate bids #7, 10 and 11. These bids include the improved traffic and bus loops for Mile Creek School, as well as the additional parking at that site. Mr. Neviasser commended Mr. Sheiness for his assistance in this decision-making and financial advice.

MOTION: Mr. Lodge made a motion, which was seconded by Mr. Lowry, to approve bid alternate 7, 10 and 11 for the Mile Creek School sitework.

Follow-up discussion centered on length of time to complete work (over two summers); addition of parking spaces; safety design of the newly designed parent drop-off; trust in professional experts who designed new configuration; input from community; whether there is a need for speed bumps; storm drainage system and whether it would affect Mile Creek Road; and warranties on work.

VOTE: the Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

4. Approval of HVAC Commissioning Services at Mile Creek School

Ron Turner, Director of Facilities and Technology, provided the following background information on this agenda item:

We are requesting Board of Ed approval for the proposal submitted by CES for HVAC commissioning services for the HVAC portion of the Mile Creek School's renovation. Commissioning is a systematic process that ensures all building systems perform interactively and meet the owner's requirements. This involves verifying and documenting that the HVAC systems are installed correctly, function as intended, and operate efficiently.

CES has a proven track record, having successfully conducted HVAC inspections at the high school, and CES is also under contract and actively working to commission the three HVAC schools. Their familiarity with our existing systems will help maintain consistency in documentation and standards across all our schools. Furthermore, since a division of CES engineered the proposed systems, they possess in-depth knowledge that will enhance the commissioning process.

Moving forward with this proposal will ensure optimal performance of the new HVAC systems and provide long-term benefits to the facilities. The monetary value of CES's proposal is included in the overall construction budget and also under budget compared to what was estimated in the project soft costs, making this a financially prudent choice.

MOTION: Mrs. Fogliano made a motion, which was seconded by Mr. Staab, to award Consulting Engineering Services, Inc., a contract to perform commissioning services for the Mile Creek School construction project for \$64,600 and to waive the bidding process.

VOTE: the Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

5. Approval of Tuition Student at LOLHS for 2024-2025

Mr. Neviasser reviewed a tuition student request for the current school year at LOLHS. He recommended approval of the request.

MOTION: Mr. Staab made a motion, which was seconded by Mrs. James, to approve the tuition student request at LOLHS as presented.

VOTE: the Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

6. Approval of Tuition Student (1st grader) for 2025-2026

Mr. Neviasser reviewed a tuition student request for the 2025-2026 school year (1st grader). He recommended approval of the request.

MOTION: Mr. Staab made a motion, which was seconded by Mrs. Shoemaker, to approve the tuition student request as presented.

VOTE: the Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

IX. Old Business

There was no old business to discuss.

X. Executive Session

There was no need for an executive session.

XI. Adjournment

The regular meeting adjourned at 8:49 p.m. upon a motion by Mrs. Shoemaker and a second by Mr. Staab.

Respectfully submitted,
Martha Shoemaker, Secretary

My public comments from 03/05/25:

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Board of Education tonight. My name is Mona Colwell. I live in Old Lyme.

I'm here tonight to discuss the increase in our school budget.

The argument that's going on over cutting or not cutting music programs and the fight to keep music is very similar to a situation that we had in 2019 here in Old Lyme.

In that year, the proposed Region 18 budget for a population that was the same as today included reckless additions that were not approved by the town of Old Lyme and omissions for things that were extremely important to the people in Old Lyme.

The resulting conversations ended in a lot of turmoil within our town, and ultimately everybody had to settle for a highly dissatisfactory budget. We were threatened by the administration that if we didn't approve the proposed budget, there could be cuts to student programming.

We as taxpayers, from that budget forward, have been straddled with increased funding for an unapproved program that continues to exist to this day in the town. I'm referring to the universal pre-K program that the administration pushed through, is funded by taxpayers, yet has never been itemized and approved by us at large in the town.

In 2021, right after the Board of Education elections, an insane set of proposals was pushed forward where we would have to spend \$60 million for renovations to three of our buildings. Think about that from an intellectual stand point: do any of our school buildings look like \$20-million buildings? Seriously?

The Board of Education and Region 18 schools allowed for our taxpayer money to be used to spread propaganda to all of the citizens in this town - five pieces of propaganda to every resident - to push forward a proposal because our population was going to "explode."

I know, and many people in this room know, that there was never a great conversation about all of the options that could have been explored and ways to reduce the cost to the taxpayers in Old Lyme. In fact, the two meetings where the public was supposed to be a part of the conversations were filibustered with people begging the BOE to spend \$58- million on a concept, not real plans.

Here we are today with the same number of students that we had in 2019, construction disrupting education everywhere and classrooms that could have been utilized in Center School. Promises to keep costs low from our BOE have not materialized.

We are seeing the costs of these very bad decisions in the budget increase today. Even worse than just a large increase, the proposed budget cuts people to pay for astronomical debt, interest and other related bond fees. Our budget increase is so newsworthy that the whole state is talking about our increase this year - that's embarrassing.

According to Ian Neviasser's presentation to the Lyme Board and Finance, there's a \$3-4 million discretionary fund right now that Region 18 school district is holding for extremely overpriced - perhaps even questionably priced - future projects.

For example, \$750,000 for a storage shed. How is that cost even written down in seriousness in a report? I would request that the Board of Education ask any residents in the town of Old Lyme who are currently working in construction to give quotes on what it would cost to help repair the shed that Region 18 currently has left in complete disregard.

Many will agree that the cost of maintenance is far less than the cost of letting things fall apart and then replacing them. Again, this was the issue that we had in 2019 where our facilities were left to fall apart. Should the taxpayers have to pay when Region 18 doesn't prepare and execute proper maintenance for their facilities?

And here we are fighting over whether or not to keep a new music teacher in the elementary school and reduce programming at the high school. If we offered this programming to the same number of students in 2019, why reduce it today? Just a few years ago, all middle school children took band or music. Was that programming changed? Did our appreciation and love of the arts change as a community?

The cost of reducing one teacher are so small compared to \$750,000 projected for a shed. Forcing teachers into difficult situations will lead to Region 18 being a less desirable school district for the best educators. Meanwhile, we have extra administration expenses for a population that has not exploded. How do we justify the financial decisions? Does Region 18 value bloated costs on building projects and extra administrative costs over teachers, students and music programs?

As a member of the Board of Education, it would be wise to do a line by line audit of the budget not just for this year, but for all the preceding years and really look at what is the overall goal of the expenses. Removing extra administration costs would more than cover the cuts and changes that are being made to music. The funds set aside for future projects should be used today for the current project; reduce the debts of the town.

There are people on this Board of Education who sit on other boards, have known about these issues, have participated in creating these tax burdens yet have run their campaigns on helping to keep our schools great, town taxes affordable and on transparency. You are not living up to your campaign promises.

I would challenge the Board to present a better budget. Cutting important programming in the arts is the opposite of our values. Borrowing excessive amounts of money and paying huge fees is the furthest thing from making Old Lyme affordable and an attractive place to live. I challenge you to challenge this budget; use your time that you volunteered for to cut waste out of the budget, use reserves for our debt and do not threaten to cut services to our children.

Thank you,

Mona Colwell

The opinions expressed in the attached correspondence are solely those of the authors. They do not purport to reflect the position of the Regional School District #18 Board of Education or its employees.

Summary of Communication to Board of Education
March 5, 2025

Sender	Date	Subject
Tracie Ortoleva	March 2, 2025	Proposed reduction in music/arts.
Mary Lou and Michael Rice	March 3, 2025 March 4, 2025	To express their dismay at the proposed cuts to the music program.

Delaura, Jeanne

From: Tracie Ortoleva <smigs368@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, March 2, 2025 9:11 PM
To: Brown, Scott (BOE); Dean-Frazier, Laura (BOE); Fogliano, Susan (BOE); James, Anna (BOE); Kemp, Jason (BOE); Lodge, Gavin (BOE); Lowry, Alexander (BOE); Shoemaker, Martha (BOE); Staab, Christopher (BOE); Delaura, Jeanne; Neviaser, Ian; Wygonik, James
Subject: proposed reduction in Music/ARTs

Tracie Ortoleva

7 Wychwood Road
Old Lyme, CT, 06371
Smigs368@gmail.com

860-227-1392

March 2 , 2025

Lyme-Old Lyme Board of Education

49 Lyme Street
Old Lyme, CT, 06371

Subject: Protecting the Music Program in Our Schools

Dear Members of the Lyme-Old Lyme Board of Education, Mr .Ian Neviaser and James Wygonik

I am writing to express my deep concern over the proposed budget changes that would result in cuts to the music program. While I understand the need to manage building cost debt, I strongly urge the board to reconsider reductions that would negatively impact a program so vital to our students' education and development.

Music is not just an extracurricular activity; it is a core component of a well-rounded education. Studies consistently show that participation in music programs enhances academic performance, improves cognitive skills, and fosters teamwork, creativity, and discipline. Our music program is an essential part of what makes Lyme-Old Lyme schools exceptional, and removing or reducing it would be a disservice to our students and community.

This program has had a profound impact on my own children. My daughter, Sophia Grace, participated in the Lyme-Old Lyme music program and is now a senior at Bryant University, where she is a member of the A'Cappella group *Bottom Line*. She has competed at the regional collegiate level and contributed to two albums. My son, Ryan, a junior, has been actively involved in the high school musicals and is a dedicated member of *Select Singers*. The expertise and guidance of "KP" have been instrumental in fostering their immersion in the arts, helping them develop into well-rounded, confident young adults who will carry these skills into their futures.

Additionally, the proposed plan to split one teacher between two schools is unrealistic and detrimental to both students and staff. Such an arrangement does not allow for strong teacher-to-peer relationships, diminishes the quality of instruction, and stretches resources too thin to maintain the high standards our students deserve.

From a fiscal standpoint, I also have concerns regarding the **five-year building plan**, which allocates approximately **\$150,000 each for both the high school and middle school** to upgrade the light and sound systems. Who made this recommendation, and has a professional company assessed whether these upgrades are truly necessary? Have cost-effective modifications been explored to extend the life of the current systems?

Given the proposed staffing changes, it will already be a challenge to successfully put on both the high school and middle school musicals—so why is this upgrade being prioritized in this fiscal year when cuts are being made elsewhere?

Furthermore, with a **\$3 million contingency fund** available, the district has the means to offset additional costs without sacrificing critical programs. Redirecting a portion of these funds to preserve music education is a reasonable and necessary step to ensure students continue to receive the high-quality instruction that has long been a hallmark of our schools.

Budget constraints are a challenge, but cutting music education is not the solution. I urge the board to explore alternative cost-saving measures that do not sacrifice programs that contribute so much to student success and community pride. I appreciate your time and dedication to our schools and hope you will prioritize keeping music education accessible for all students.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue. I look forward to your response and to discussing potential solutions that will allow the music program to continue thriving.

Sincerely,
Tracie Ortoleva, concerned parent and constituent of Old Lyme

I would appreciate a written response to the above proposed questions as this leads to further understanding and an increase in transparency of the fiscal responsibility that is owed to the constituents of Lyme Old Lyme.

Delaura, Jeanne

From: Mary Lou Rice <marylouise.rice@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, March 3, 2025 12:38 PM
To: Delaura, Jeanne
Subject: For the Board of Education --Music program

Good afternoon,

We are writing to express our dismay at the proposed cuts to the music program at Region 18 schools. I am a taxpayer in Old Lyme.

Our 4 children went through Region 18 schools from 1989 through 2017. They all benefited greatly from the music programs: band, chorus, participation in the musicals and classes. Being able to participate in the arts was their refuge and music continues to be part of their adult lives. We now have grandchildren in both Mile Creek and the Middle school who are benefitting from the music program.

I am sure you are very aware of research that supports music education in the areas of improved cognitive outcomes, focus, academics, social-emotional learning, etc. Music education challenges students and brings them together with peers that they might not interact with in the usual course of their day. For example, the musicals always brought together students that were academically gifted, struggled academically, sports oriented, etc. This broke them out of their usual social and academic groupings to forge new relationships with others they may not connect with in the course of their day. Being able to interact with those who have different backgrounds and interests is a key life skill. Students need to develop interpersonal and individual skills beyond their academic achievements. Music, whether instrumental or choral, strengthens connections, positively impacts mental health and creative expression for emotional release.

With our children spending more time in front of screens both for learning and recreation, we absolutely need the music program to stay fully funded in the budget.

We strongly urge the board of education to fully fund the music program in Region 18.

Mary Lou Rice and Michael Rice

6 Lee Dr.

Old Lyme, CT 06371

Delaura, Jeanne

From: Mary Lou Rice <marylouise.rice@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, March 4, 2025 10:44 AM
To: Neviaser, Ian
Cc: Delaura, Jeanne; Lowry, Alexander (BOE); James, Anna (BOE); Brown, Scott (BOE); Staab, Christopher (BOE); Lodge, Gavin (BOE); Kemp, Jason (BOE); Dean-Frazier, Laura (BOE); Shoemaker, Martha (BOE); Fogliano, Susan (BOE); I.C.E Michael Rice
Subject: Re: For the Board of Education --Music program

Dear Ian,

Thank you for responding and clarifying that the music program will not endure fiscal cuts. Only realignment, which is good news.

However, I continue to object to spreading teachers too thin and reducing opportunities for participation, as will most likely be the outcome. The potential impact could cause a loss of incredibly dedicated and talented teachers. I would anticipate an effect on the region's ability to participate in such things as the competitions of Eastern Region, All State, the musicals, etc. One of my children had first hand experience with a musical director who was in the district but not a music educator. It was a poor experience. Thankfully she had one opportunity before she graduated in a musical with the music department.

I have seen many realignments in the district since 1989. The ebb and flow of enrollment fluctuates. Making these changes will limit Region 18's ability to attract and keep the talented educators for the time when enrollment increases again.

I remain in strong objection to impacting the music educators in Region 18.

Thank you,

Mary Lou Rice and Michael Rice.

On Tue, Mar 4, 2025 at 10:16 AM Neviaser, Ian <neviaseri@region18.org> wrote:

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Rice,

Thank you for sharing your concerns regarding music education in the Lyme-Old Lyme Schools. Unfortunately, the information you have received regarding the music program is not accurate. There are no proposed cuts to any music programming in our budget. We are consolidating our music staff to account for a smaller number of students at LOLHS. This in no way will impact any programming for students.

Aligning our staffing resources with the number of students we have is a common practice that we utilize in our budget development process on an annual basis. Over the last few years we have made similar changes in the following areas with no impact to programming. The same will apply to our music program and will not reduce or change any musical offerings at any of our schools.

- English
- Math
- Science
- World Language
- Art
- Physical Education

- Library/Media
- Counseling
- Administration
- Special Education
- Speech Therapy
- Secretarial Staff
- School Psychology

As the number of students at each building ebbs and flows we regularly adjust staffing to account for those changes. Currently we have too many music teachers for the number of students we have resulting in teachers with limited teaching duties. Continuation of this model would not be fiscally responsible.

Thank you for understanding that this is not a reduction of music programming but is simply an adjustment to account for a decline in our student population at LOLHS. Please feel free to share this response with others who may have similar concerns, and do not hesitate to reach out with any further questions.

Thank you,

Ian Neviaser

Ian Neviaser

Superintendent of Schools

Region #18 Lyme- Old Lyme Schools

49 Lyme Street

Old Lyme, CT 06371

(860) 434-7238 (office)

(619) 607-3310 (mobile)

(860) 434-9959 (fax)

neviaseri@region18.org

www.region18.org

Follow us on [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), and [Facebook](#)

expression, genetic information, sexual orientation, pregnancy, or disability in accordance with Titles VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Educational Amendments Act of 1972, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans With Disabilities Act, and appropriate state laws.

From: Delaura, Jeanne <delauraj@region18.org>

Sent: Tuesday, March 4, 2025 9:05 AM

To: Neviaser, Ian <neviaseri@region18.org>; Lowry, Alexander (BOE) <lowrya@region18.org>; James, Anna (BOE) <jamesa@region18.org>; Brown, Scott (BOE) <sbrown@region18.org>; Staab, Christopher (BOE) <staabc@region18.org>; Lodge, Gavin (BOE) <lodgeg@region18.org>; Kemp, Jason (BOE) <kempj@region18.org>; Dean-Frazier, Laura (BOE) <deanfrazierl@region18.org>; Shoemaker, Martha (BOE) <shoemakerm@region18.org>; Martha Shoemaker (1st selectwoman) <mshoemaker@oldlyme-ct.gov>; Fogliano, Susan (BOE) <foglianos@region18.org>

Subject: FW: For the Board of Education --Music program

From: Mary Lou Rice <marylouise.rice@gmail.com>

Sent: Monday, March 3, 2025 12:38 PM

To: Delaura, Jeanne <delauraj@region18.org>

Subject: For the Board of Education --Music program

Good afternoon,

We are writing to express our dismay at the proposed cuts to the music program at Region 18 schools. I am a taxpayer in Old Lyme.

Our 4 children went through Region 18 schools from 1989 through 2017. They all benefited greatly from the music programs: band, chorus, participation in the musicals and classes. Being able to participate in the arts was their refuge and music continues to be part of their adult lives.

We now have grandchildren in both Mile Creek and the Middle school who are benefitting from the music program.

I am sure you are very aware of research that supports music education in the areas of improved cognitive outcomes, focus, academics, social-emotional learning, etc. Music education challenges students and brings them together with peers that they might not interact with in the

usual course of their day. For example, the musicals always brought together students that were academically gifted, struggled academically, sports oriented, etc. This broke them out of their usual social and academic groupings to forge new relationships with others they may not connect with in the course of their day. Being able to interact with those who have different backgrounds and interests is a key life skill. Students need to develop interpersonal and individual skills beyond their academic achievements. Music, whether instrumental or choral, strengthens connections, positively impacts mental health and creative expression for emotional release.

With our children spending more time in front of screens both for learning and recreation, we absolutely need the music program to stay fully funded in the budget.

We strongly urge the board of education to fully fund the music program in Region 18.

Mary Lou Rice and Michael Rice

6 Lee Dr.

Old Lyme, CT 06371



March 3rd, 2025

Mr. Ian Neviaser
Superintendent of Schools
Region 18 Mile Creek School Phase 2
tel: 860.434.7238
neviaseri@region18.org

Project: REGION 18 MILE CREEK SCHOOL
205 Mile Creek Road Old Lyme, CT

Re: Letter of Authorization #3 (LOA) for
Fire Suppression Bid taken on 2/14/2025

Based on the attached bid results and subsequent scope review with the apparent low bidder(s), Downes Construction Company, LLC recommends the contract for the above referenced Bid Package be awarded to:

Bid Package	Subcontractor Name & Address	Contract Sum
BP#21.1 Fire Suppression	H.H.S. Mechanical Contractors, Inc. 80 Colonial Road Manchester, CT 06042	Seventy Two Thousand Dollars and Zero Cents\$72,000.00

Major notes on recommendation:

None

We believe that the above contractor(s) are the lowest responsible qualified bidder for the bid packages listed and request your agreement to issue contracts. This value will be included in our future GMP Amendment #3. By signing this Approval Letter, Regional School District #18 and the Building Committee is authorizing Downes Construction Company, LLC to commence construction phase 2 services and agrees to compensate Downes Construction Company, LLC for this work as a component of GMP Amendment #3 (Phase 2 Construction and General Conditions and Phase) to our contract. If there are any questions or concerns, please contact me at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,
Downes Construction Company, LLC

Ben Stoner
Project Manager

Copy to: File; Budget Update Sheet Attached

I hereby authorize Downes Construction to proceed with construction in accordance with our agreement.

Agreed by:
Regional School District #18

Agreed by:

(Signature)

(Signature)

(Printed name and title)

(Printed name and title)

(Date)

(Date)

Please return one (1) signed copy of this letter indicating your approvals of the above