

New Hartford Public Schools
Board of Education Special Meeting (In-Person)
Ann Antolini Elementary School - Library
6:00PM on Tuesday, March 11, 2025

PRESENT: Superintendent Jeffrey Sousa; Chairman Timothy Klepps; Vice Chairman Thomas Buzzi

Board Members: Meagan Albert; Penny Miller; Erik Perotti; Timothy Russell; Deirdre Tindall and Kristin Young

Board Members Absent: Frank Rodenberg

Additional Present: Kelly Carroll; Amy Kennedy; Michael Lynch; Heather Mathes

Chairman Timothy Klepps called the special meeting to order at 6:00PM.

A. Pledge of Allegiance

B. Old Business

2025-2026 (Proposed) Budget Discussion and Possible Adoption

Superintendent Sousa presented four proposed budget cut options for the Board of Education to consider at: **5.70% (\$560,500), 5.41% (\$532,500), 4.70% (\$462,500) and 4.17% (\$410,000), a decrease from the original proposal at 8.86% (\$871,145.55)**. Mr. Sousa expressed the largest budget drivers are Employee Salaries, Employee Benefits (Health Insurance) and Pupil Services (Outplacement Tuition). When Superintendent Sousa began his position with New Hartford Public Schools there were approximately 15 students in CREC magnets schools, and there are now approximately 2.

1. The first option is a proposed budget increase at 5.70% which cuts \$309,150, for an increase of \$560,500. The items are listed from least impactful to most impactful to the students.

The first option eliminates the following: Maintenance (Painting) (15,000), Independent Evaluations (10,000), SPED Services CREC Magnet (10,000), Technology (Refresh) (10,000), Arrow Security (1) (75,000), Instructional Assistant (1) (29,000), Clerical Aide (1) (37,000), Online Resources (2,000), Textbooks (23,000), White Memorial (10,150), Talented & Gifted, Math Olympiads (5,000), CJR (35,000) and 5th & 6th Grade Band (No General Music .6FTE) (48,000).

Mr. Sousa expressed his regret in implementing a cut which reduces staff. The cut of textbooks would take away student literacy books. White Memorial, which is a proposed cut, is a sixth-grade field trip for approximately 50-60 students for three days. CJR (Connecticut Junior Republic) provides counseling support to approximately 22 students currently and an additional day of mental health support. The 5th and 6th grade band would not be eliminated but rather an after-school stipend position, the .6FTP translates to 3 days a week. This position would be eliminated, and the instrumental music teacher instead would be teaching general music at all three schools.

2. The second option is a proposed budget increase at 5.41% which cuts \$337,150 for an increase of \$532,500. The second option eliminates all items in the first option, plus: Paraeducator (1) (28,000).
3. The third option is a proposed budget increase of 4.70% which cuts \$408,650 for an increase of \$462,500. The third option eliminates all items in the first and second option plus an additional staff position: SEL Counselor (1) Mental Health (71,500) which provides mental health support at Antolini and Bakerville, assisting the School Psychologist. This position was added two years ago through a grant.

4. Lastly, the fourth option is a proposed budget increase at 4.17% which cuts \$461,050, for an increase of \$410,000. The fourth option eliminates all items in the first three options, plus an additional staff position: full-time Paraeducator (1) (52,400) inclusive of health and benefits, which the Paraeducator in option two did not have as a part-time position.

Ms. Miller is saddened to see the White Memorial, Talented & Gifted, Math Olympiads, and Band as proposed eliminations from the budget. Ms. Miller has expressed her desire to cut elsewhere in the budget, these programs are important to the children. Penny Miller also voiced her concern with decreasing enrollment, she advocated to the other Board Members the potential cost savings could be had if a school was closed. Ms. Miller stated in the last 19 years the average budget increase was 2.28%, with many years below 4%. Ms. Miller will only support the proposed budget increase at 4.17%, nothing higher.

Board Member Penny Miller left the meeting.

Deirdre Tindall reiterates her desire to find funding elsewhere, such as fundraisers to pay for items like: White Memorial, Textbooks or Talented & Gifted, Math Olympiads. Thomas Buzzi expressed out of the first option he agrees with all cuts proposed by the Superintendent but would keep: the Instructional Assistant (1), White Memorial, and Talented & Gifted, Math Olympiads. Mr. Buzzi would instead add the SEL Counselor (1) Mental Health, a Paraeducator (1) and the Data Systems Specialist to the list of eliminations. Mr. Buzzi states with these suggested cuts the changes would bring the budget cuts closer to \$400,000.

Mr. Perotti agrees to keep the Instructional Assistant (1) but disagrees with cutting the SEL Counselor (1) Mental Health, he feels this position is not one that should be eliminated. Timothy Russell expresses to cut the SEL Counselor (1) Mental Health and keep the Paraeducator (1). Timothy Klepps does not want to see White Memorial and Talented & Gifted cut. Mr. Klepps is not in favor of eliminating Maintenance (Painting), he suggested to swap this item for emergency repairs. Timothy Klepps struggles to cut the SEL Counselor (1) Mental Health because this was advocated to the Board of Education as very impactful to the students and staff. Kristin Young agrees with Timothy Klepps, eliminating the SEL Counselor (1) Mental Health, has a very high impact on not only students but staff as well. The SEL Counselor (1) Mental Health position was instrumental in providing touchpoints or resources for the community outside of the school setting, along with CJR (Connecticut Junior Republic). Kristin Young feels drawing an arbitrary line to decrease the budget too, does not match up with reality. Ms. Young would rather take a proposed budget to the Board of Finance, to bring the numbers to a wider audience for the entire community to be aware of the choices that must be made by the Board of Education. Kristin Young strongly feels that the Board of Education should not operate in a vacuum and present the proposed budget to a larger audience.

MOTION by Thomas Buzzi to approve Superintendent Sousa's proposed budget at the 5.70% increase with modifications as follows: keep Instructional Assistant (1), White Memorial, Talented & Gifted, Math Olympiads, and add the elimination of SEL Counselor (1) Mental Health for \$71,500, which would result in a budget of \$10,341,676.14, for a cut total of \$336,500 which equals a 5.16% budget increase. Second by Timothy Russell.

Erik Perotti disagrees; Mr. Perotti emphasized his desire to keep this position. Mr. Perotti feels the SEL Counselor (1) Mental Health should not be cut, cuts should be made elsewhere if needed and feels that by cutting this position the children would not receive the services that the Board of Education should be providing them. Thomas Buzzi raised concern that this SEL Counselor (1) Mental Health position was added through a grant and has only been in place for two years, prior to the past two years, functions of the school were able to be completed without this grant funded position. Deirdre Tindall agrees with Thomas Buzzi, Ms. Tindall supports cutting the SEL Counselor (1) Mental Health and states a certain degree of mental health responsibilities need to be put on the parents, the school cannot absorb all the mental health services that are needed. Deirdre Tindall is not in favor of cutting Paraeducator, if possible, Ms. Tindall is not in favor of cutting any staff, but there is tough decision to be made. Deirdre Tindall supports the cut of the Instructional Assistant (1). There was discussion that White Memorial

(10,150) and Talented & Gifted, Math Olympiads (5,000), can still happen through fundraising or other efforts outside the budget. Erik Perotti expressed to all members of the Board of Education that at this time the Board Members should not worry about what the Board of Finance will say but rather advocate for the best education possible for the students of New Hartford.

Aye: Megan Albert, Thomas Buzzi, Timothy Russell

Naye: Timothy Klepps, Erik Perotti, Deirdre Tindall, Kristin Young

Abstain:

(3-4-0)

Motion Fails

MOTION by Erik Perotti to approve the proposed budget increase at \$560,500 for a 5.70% - the first page of Superintendent Sousa's proposal (blue sheet), as is, with \$309,150 in cuts. Second by Kristin Young.

Aye: Erik Perotti

Naye: Megan Albert, Thomas Buzzi, Timothy Russell, Deirdre Tindall, Kristin Young

Abstain:

(1-6-0)

Motion Fails

MOTION by Timothy Russell to approve Superintendent Sousa's proposed budget at the 5.70% increase with modifications as follows: keep Instructional Assistant (1), Talented & Gifted, Math Olympiads, and add the elimination of SEL Counselor (1) Mental Health for \$71,500, for a cut total of \$346,650 which is a 5.34%, this motion is the same as Thomas Buzzi's motion with the exception of Mr. Russell does not wish to keep White Memorial (eliminate White Memorial). Second by Thomas Buzzi.

Aye: Megan Albert, Thomas Buzzi and Timothy Russell

Naye: Timothy Klepps, Erik Perotti, Deirdre Tindall, Kristin Young

Abstain:

(3-4-0)

Motion Fails

MOTION by Timothy Klepps to approve Superintendent Sousa's proposed budget at 5.70% with modifications as follows: move Maintenance (Painting) to Emergency Repairs, keep the Instructional Assistant (1), White Memorial, Talented & Gifted, Math Olympiads, and add the part-time Paraeducator at \$28,000 as an elimination, the budget amount would be \$10,412,676 for a \$578,146 dollar variance which is a 5.88% increase. Second by Erik Perotti.

Aye: Timothy Klepps, Erik Perotti, Kristin Young

Naye: Megan Albert, Thomas Buzzi, Timothy Russell, Deirdre Tindall

Abstain:

(3-4-0)

Motion Fails

MOTION by Deirdre Tindall to approve Superintendent Sousa's increase of 5.70% (blue sheet) approving all eliminations and add the SEL Counselor (1) Mental Health as an elimination for a total budget cut of \$380,650, the budget would be \$10,325,026 for a \$490,496 dollar variance which lands the proposed budget at a 4.99% increase. Second by Thomas Buzzi.

Aye: Megan Albert, Thomas Buzzi, Timothy Russell, Deirdre Tindall
Naye: Timothy Klepps, Erik Perotti, Kristin Young
Abstain:

(4-3-0)
Motion Passes

MOTION by Thomas Buzzi to formally adopt the 2025-2026 proposed budget by the Board of Education for \$10,325,026 (\$490,496 dollar variance/increase) for a budget increase of 4.99%. Second by Timothy Russell.

Aye: Megan Albert, Thomas Buzzi, Timothy Russell, Deirdre Tindall
Naye: Timothy Klepps, Erik Perotti, Kristin Young
Abstain:

(4-3-0)
Motion Passes

I. Adjournment

MOTION by Thomas Buzzi to adjourn the meeting at 7:14PM. Second by Deirdre Tindall.

UNANIMOUS
Motion Passes

Respectfully submitted by,
Elizabeth Domas, Recording Secretary

Recorded Regular and Special Board of Education meetings will be posted to:
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCX-ZlomWmjG81dc_QM3rfg

Attachments: *(Filed with the Town Clerk and available upon request, or see links included if available)*

Email from Marcia Jones (3/10/25) - Link will be available with March 18, 2025, Minutes

Letter from New Hartford Education Association (3/11/25) - Link will be available with March 18, 2025, Minutes

2025-2026 Budget Scenarios (4)

<https://resources.finalsite.net/images/v1741788032/newhtfdorg/k50mb4ogtrrjowcwj8p/Budget20252026ScenariosSummariesBOE31125.pdf>

Budget Calculator Final 3-11-25

<https://resources.finalsite.net/images/v1741788067/newhtfdorg/vu9hvf75wzu7jrvnppp/BudgetCalculator31125Final.pdf>

Final BOE Adopted Budget (Eliminations) at 4.99%

<https://resources.finalsite.net/images/v1741793512/newhtfdorg/pwahpnk1dqevh0hatbtv/FinalBOEadoptedbudget2025-2026.pdf>

2025-2026 NH BOE Adopted Budget – March 11, 2025

https://resources.finalsite.net/images/v1741804893/newhtfdorg/m8our0qkmcvxek9eoezy/2025-2026NewHartfordBoardofEducationAdoptedBudgetxlsx_1.pdf