

**GOVERNOR WENTWORTH REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT WARRANT
THE STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE**

**First Session of Annual Meeting (Deliberative)
February 1, 2025**

The meeting was called to order at 10:00 am by Moderator Kaitlyn Purdy Murphy.

Moderator introduces the head table: Dana Streeter, School Board Member from Ossipee, Tom Bickford School Board member from New Durham, Mary Schillereff, At-Large School Board member from Wolfeboro, Dr. Elizabeth Sheckler, School Board Member from New Durham, Charlene Siebel, School Board Member Wolfeboro, James Pitman, School Board Member from Effingham, Brodie Deshaies, Chair, School Board Member from Wolfeboro, Dr. Caroline Arakelian, Superintendent, Shane Archambault, Esquire, Kathy O'Blenes, Business Administrator, Kathy Lagace, School Board Secretary, Michelle Capone, School District Clerk, and Randy Walker, Assistant Moderator.

The moderator reviewed the purpose rules of the meeting, noting that non-residents may not vote on articles, and explained the process for votes on articles as either amended or as originally written. Approved articles will appear on the ballot as written or amended. Motions to restrict approved articles for further consideration can be made at any time. Once vote to restrict passes, no further discussion on article will be allowed.

Moderator Murphy stated that Article I is voted on election day and shared that Robert J. Bowie Sr. and Danielle Jean Van Dusen are running for the open Ossipee seat.

Moderator turned the meeting over to Chair Brodie Deshaies to give State of the Schools Address

Chair Deshaies guided assembly in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chair Deshaies welcomed the assembly and highlighted the activities and accomplishments of the past year at Kingswood Regional High School, Lakes Regional Technical Center, Kingswood Middle School, Carpenter School, Crescent Lake School, Effingham Elementary School, New Durham School, Ossipee Central School, and Tuftonboro Central School.

Chair Deshaies extended the Board's gratitude to the faculty, staff and administration for their compassion, dedication, and tireless efforts on behalf of the school community.

Chair Deshaies turned the meeting back over to the Moderator.

Moderator Murphy read Article I.

ARTICLE I: To choose the following school district officers:

- (a) School Board Member from Effingham.....3-year term
School Board Member from Ossipee.....3-year term
School Board Member-At-Large.....3-year term
- (b) School District Moderator.....1-year term

Moderator stated she is running again for Moderator.

Moderator Reads Article II.

ARTICLE II: Shall the Governor Wentworth Regional School District raise and appropriate as an operating budget, not including appropriations by special warrant articles and other appropriations voted separately, the amounts set forth on the budget posted with the warrant or as amended by vote of the first session, for the purposes set forth therein, totaling \$67,427,393? Should this article be defeated, the default budget shall be \$66,574,504 which is the same as last year, with certain adjustments required by previous action of the Governor Wentworth Regional School District or by law; or the governing body may hold one special meeting, in accordance with RSA 40:13, X and XVI, to take up the issue of a revised operating budget only. * NOTE: This warrant article (operating budget) does not include appropriations requested in ANY of the other warrant articles. The School Board recommends this appropriation. 6-2-0 (Majority vote required)

Motion to accept the article as read made by Chair Deshaies and seconded.

Chair Deshaies reviewed and explained the budget process, enrollments by school, general fund costs, and proposed new staff positions, including the Student Wellness Coordinator position role as impacted by the completion of the Huggins Hospital Nursing contract.

He explained that budget preparation began in October with meetings with Administrators, followed by public meetings in November, the preliminary public review in December, and the final Budget Hearing in January.

Chair Deshaies reviewed revenue sources which include local and state Adequacy Aid, Building Aid, Vocational Aide, Special Education Aid, Child Nutrition Aid, school lunch sales, and tuition paid by out of district students. He also reviewed debt service as impacted by responsible fiscal management and retired bonds school projects. The remaining Kingswood Complex debt also continues to decrease each year as payments are made. He pointed out the correlation between reduction in debt and reduction in state building aid and how that affects the budget and in turn increases the need for local funding.

Chair Deshaies reviewed the tax impact per town from the operating budget, noting the largest increases being health insurance, utilities lines, building and service agreements, professional services, and replacement of vehicles.

Chair Deshaies reminded voters that monies not spent are returned to the taxpayers.

Chair Deshaies reviewed the difference between the proposed budget and the default budget. The default budget of \$852,889 is lower than proposed budget but is 5.25% higher than last year's budget due to unavoidable costs. He explained that the difference between the two budgets is minimal and the challenge is to manage rising expenses.

Chair Deshaies turned the meeting over to the Moderator who opened the floor for discussion.

Scott Lounsbury, Wolfeboro, asked for an explanation of the difference between federal funding \$1.5 million on one slide and \$1.3 million on the default budget. Ms. O'Blenes explained that one side includes all federal funds and the second side separates grant funds from other federal funds.

Mr. Lounsbury asked how proposed cuts regarding DEI will affect the budget and how the district would recover funds. Chair Deshaies stated that the district does not receive any DEI funds and that the School Board will be reviewing the district's policies to meet current laws and update as necessary.

Mr. Lounsbury asked what DEI initiatives the district will need to get rid of or eliminate? Superintendent Arakelian stated that the district does not receive DEI-specific funding and does not have DEI-specific programs or positions. Rather, the district has equity policies and safety policies in place.

Glenn Cordelli, State Representative for Ossipee, Tuftonboro and Wolfeboro, asked for clarification on Articles III and V salary increases and whether they are included in Article II. Moderator Murphy stated those articles weren't open for discussion but allowed the question as it was relevant to current discussion. Ms. O'Blenes stated that the salaries are not included in Article II.

Representative Cordelli asked where these salaries were included what was the proposed budget increase? Ms. O'Blenes referred to the blue handout showing a total increase of 8.76%.

David Bickford, New Durham requested the reasoning for two dissenting board votes. Chair Deshaies explained that one dissenting member was not currently in attendance to explain their vote. Charlene Seibel responded that her dissention was based on the amount of the proposed budget increase.

Susan DeRoy, New Durham, Representative for Middleton and New Durham, asked why the Board doesn't follow the state requirement to reduce budgets by 4%, commented on the burden district families face, and stated that New Durham carries a 60% school expense in tax bills. Chair Deshaies stated that issues at the state level affect the funds received, that federal and state mandates must be covered, and that increased operating costs impact the budget. He further explained that the district negotiated new staff agreements for the coming year and the cost for Out of District placements has increased significantly.

Bobbi Boudman, Wolfeboro, asked how much funding comes from the state via Catastrophic Aid and how much the 33% is short for reimbursements. Ms. O'Blenes did not have an exact number and stated that the district must follow what the DRA dictates for inclusion in a budget and holds to what the state is budgeting.

Ms. Boudman asked if the \$632,000 increase is included in the default budget or will funds have to be taken from other areas if the budget isn't passed. Chair Deshaies responded that these expenses would have to come from other areas. He also explained that approximately 75% of the budget increase is due to Special Education expenses.

Ms. Boudman asked if approximately 17% of students are Special Education students. Chair Deshaies confirmed this number and confirmed again that \$632,000 is not included in default budget.

Steve Johnson, Wolfeboro, asked if a complete copy of presentation is available, shared his concern for the increase in the overall budget, and asked for clarification on the District's definition of equity and how it is determined. Chair Deshaies answered that the presentation will be available on the website and explained that the district believes equitable means equitable access to learning for all students.

Mr. Johnson encouraged the Board to consider how to cover costs with existing staff, noting that reducing teaching staff while increasing administrative staff and losing students but raising the budget is counter intuitive. Chair Deshaies stated that there are no new administrative positions in the proposed budget and clarified that the Wellness Coordinator position is not administrative.

Mr. Johnson asked if academic staffing is decreasing. Chair Deshaies responded no and reminded the assembly that the teachers' agreement is up for negotiation next year and will be voted on then.

Mr. Johnson expressed support for the default budget.

Board Member Siebel stated that this is the first year she voted against a budget since becoming a Board member and that it was not a decision taken lightly but because she was concerned about the increase amount.

Ken Perry, North Wolfeboro, pointed out the discrepancy between town burdens and the decrease in state funding which causes difficulty with taxes and recommended the two representatives present to work on this.

Bobbi Boudman, Wolfeboro, asked for an explanation of the unassigned fund balance items and if any other accounts are used to supplement the budget. Ms. O'Blenes stated that the unassigned fund balance is returned to the taxpayers to offset the tax rate. Chair Deshaies stated that the district has trust funds available in the event of unanticipated expenses.

Ms. Boudman asked if the Special Education Trust Fund is used and what the balance is. Ms. O'Blenes stated that Special Education Trust Funds have not been used this year, and the balance of the fund is listed on the handout.

Representative Cordelli asked if, in any year, the district has not received the state funds allotted to them in state law. Chair Deshaies stated that the district has received all funds allocated.

Representative Cordelli commented on two lawsuits and swept funds, asked how the district plans to cope if the current funding suit goes through and changes to swept law go through, and gave examples of monies that will need to be sent to the state if the lawsuits go through. Chair Deshaies responded by explaining how the district is only allowed to raise funds based on property taxes as dictated by state law, that the local education property tax is the only way to pay for expenses approved by voters, and that the Board works to make sure children are educated and expenses are covered.

Bobbi Boudman commented on Mr. Cordelli's statement regarding swept funds. Moderator Murphy encouraged Ms. Boudman to keep to subject matter at hand.

Susan DeRoy, State Representative, New Durham, asked if the district anticipates the same State Aid request this year and if some of the dollars from last year were ESSER funds, noting that the budget appears to include this same expense of \$5 million. Chair Deshaies stated that no ESSER funds are included in 2026 budget and that the district is back to pre-covid budgets. He explained that the current year's budget includes two math coaches of the five who were hired through grant funds to help with math programs based on the result of an increase in standardized math scores. These math coach positions were included in last year's budget request and were approved.

Michelle Conlon, Wolfeboro, questioned the value received by taxpayers for their money, the process for allocating discretionary spending, and if the board has a process to analyze outcomes and meeting targets? Chair Deshaies stated that during the November budget process meetings are open to the public but are not well attended.

Stefanie King, New Durham, proposed an amendment to Article II, changing the amount of proposed operating budget to \$67,000,000.

Moderator read Article II with the amendment:

Shall the Governor Wentworth Regional School District raise and appropriate as an operating budget, not including appropriations by special warrant articles and other appropriations voted separately, the amounts set forth on the budget posted with the warrant or as amended by vote of the first session, for the purposes set forth therein, totaling \$67,000,000? Should this article be defeated, the default budget shall be \$66,574,504 which is the same as last year, with certain adjustments required by previous action of the Governor Wentworth Regional School District or by law; or the governing body may hold one special meeting, in accordance with RSA 40:13, X and XVI, to take up the issue of a revised operating budget only. * NOTE: This warrant article (operating budget) does not include appropriations requested in ANY of the other warrant articles. The School Board recommends this appropriation. 6-2-0 (Majority vote required)

Amendment seconded by Bobbi Boudman.

Chair Deshaies requested Ms. King's guidance on where cuts should be made, stating that \$400,000 was already cut from the proposed budget during the finance committee meetings. Ms. King stated it would be up to administration to find areas to cut.

Ms. Conlon suggested ways to make small cuts but would not like to see staff cuts.

Ms. Boudman suggested cutting the legal and copying budget lines.

Ellen Phillips, New Durham, stated that cuts to teachers should not be made and disagreed with the amended article.

Ken Perry, Wolfeboro, commented on Special Ed legislation passed in the late 70s.

Chair Deshaies made a motion at 11:35 am to end discussion and call the question on the amended article; motion seconded.

Moderator requested the vote on the article as amended. Amended article failed and Article II will appear on the ballot in March with a figure of \$67,427,393.

Representative Cordelli requested the dollar amount of dues paid to the School Board Association and Lakeside Academy. Ms. O'Blenes answered that \$3,600 was paid for the School Board Association and Lakeside is a three-year contract with the district in its 3rd year with a cost just shy of \$300,000.

Representative Cordelli asked if this is administered by third party and Ms. O'Blenes informed him that it is with Ombudsman.

Mr. Perry stated that Lakeside Academy has been in operation 15 years as a contracted program. Chair Deshaies stated that there are approximately 40 seats per year for students who are at risk of dropping out. The program provides up to 40 seats for \$300,000 with approximately 15 currently attending.

Ms. Boudman asked if students enrolled in Lakeside Academy are eligible for an EFA if not contracted with this program. Chair Deshaies answered that this is a state question and he does not know the answer.

With no further discussion Article II will appear in the ballot as presented.

Motion to restrict reconsideration of Article II; motion seconded; motion passed.

Moderator read Article III.

ARTICLE III: To see if the Governor Wentworth Regional School District will vote to approve the cost items included in the collective bargaining agreement reached between the Governor Wentworth Regional School Board and the Governor Wentworth Administrative Team which calls for the following increases in salaries and benefits at the current staffing level:

<u>Fiscal Year</u>	<u>Estimated Increase</u>
2026	\$ 171,398

2027	\$ 76,146
2028	\$ 79,192
2029	\$ 82,360

And further to raise and appropriate \$171,398 for the 2025-2026 fiscal year, such sum representing the additional costs attributable to the increase in salaries and benefits required by the new agreement over those that would be paid at current staffing levels. The School Board recommends this appropriation. 8-0-0 (Majority vote required)

Moderator recognized Chair Deshaies to speak to Article III

Chair Deshaies asked to clarify that Article III cannot be amended by the governing body. Attorney Archambault confirmed that it is prescribed by law and cannot be amended. Chair Deshaies explained salary increases, the proposed change for the Principals at Effingham Elementary School and Tuftonboro Central School to change from part time to full time status, and the proposed hiring of a DPT for each of the two schools. Attorney Archambault clarified that the wording of the Article can be changed but the cost items cannot.

Article III was seconded to open discussion. Point of clarification made, Principle and DPT positions are at Effingham and Tuftonboro schools.

Ms. King commented on the work of Principals and thanked them.

Chair Deshaies pointed out there are now additional working days for Assistance Principals as part of the proposed agreement.

Ms. Boudman asked how many employees are impacted by article III. Chair Deshaies confirms that there are 13.

Ms. Boudman commented that the salary increases are for 13 neighbors and friends in the community who pay their property taxes also.

Jeff Condon, Wolfeboro, asked what the percentage increase is. Chair Deshaies states 4% each year for four years.

Mr. Condon asked what the average inflation rate is and what justifies the proposed salary increase. Chair Deshaies stated that the current contracts in place were negotiated before COVID, and the Board is now making up for past losses.

David Bickford, New Durham, stated that taxpayers are not seeing a 4% increase for themselves, and voters have to be mindful that seniors are not seeing 4% increases in their retirement. Chair Deshaies commented on inflation, stating that long-term contracts are beneficial to taxpayers, and that the Board felt the proposed increase was warranted due to the previous contract negotiation happening prior to COVID and the recent increases in the cost of living.

Mr. Bickford reiterated his concern that costs are too high, and taxpayers may not be able to support the budget increase.

Ms. Boudman asked where the district is ranked on a pay scale compared to other areas of state. Chair Deshaies stated that teachers statewide currently average \$66,000 while Governor Wentworth teachers average \$33,000.

Ms. Boudman asks for the valuation of the district and how much taxpayers pay per thousand? Ms. O'Blenes stated that this is available on the handout, by town.

Karen Burnett-Kerry, Wolfeboro, stated that the average pay increase is 4%, or in some cases, median with the market, so a 4% increase for a four-year contract is not out of line and allows for stability over time. She also stated that even a salary of \$100,000 would qualify teachers to receive vouchers, indicating low-income status and the need for additional financial support.

Mr. Perry read that the total assessed value of the district is \$7,072,276,711.

Board Member Mary Schillereff, a former educator, stated that administrators are human beings who work with (the community's) children and that there is an art to being an administrator. Administrators are neighbors who wear many hats and can be the first point of contact in the community. She encouraged everyone to visit the schools.

Representative Cordelli stated that sometimes you get what you pay for.

Board Member Dr. Elizabeth Sheckler, New Durham, spoke in support of the principals who each presented very responsible budgets while keeping in mind the ability of taxpayers to support the overall budget.

With no further discussion, motion to approve Article II for the ballot as presented; motion seconded; motion passed.

Motion to restrict reconsideration of Article III; motion seconded; motion passed.

Moderator Murphy read Article IV.

ARTICLE IV: Shall the Governor Wentworth Regional School District, if Article III is defeated, authorize the governing body to call one special meeting, at its option, to address Article III cost items only. The School Board recommends this article. 8-0-0 (Majority vote required)

With no discussion, motion to approve Article IV for the ballot as presented; motion seconded; motion passed.

Motion to restrict reconsideration of Article IV; motion seconded; motion passed.

Moderator read Article IV.

Article V: To see if the Governor Wentworth Regional School District will vote to approve the cost items included in the collective bargaining agreement reached between the Governor Wentworth Regional School Board and the Governor Wentworth Support Staff Association which calls for the following increases in salaries and benefits at the current staffing levels:

<u>Fiscal Year</u>	<u>Estimated Increase</u>
2026	\$ 645,053
2027	\$ 375,660

And further to raise and appropriate the sum of \$645,053 for the 2025-2026 fiscal year, such sum representing the additional costs attributable to the increase in salaries and benefits required by the new agreement over those that would be paid at current staffing levels. The School Board recommends this appropriation. 8-0-0 (Majority vote required)

The moderator recognized Chair Deshaies to address Article V. Chair Deshaies reviewed the article, the staff, and the reasons for the increases reflected in article, stating that wages must be adjusted based on market wages and staff requirements. A wage scale was created to bring staff up to a reasonable wage, noting that some staff positions are state-mandated.

Board Member Dana Streeter explained that support staff wages did not increase proportionately following COVID as compared to other available jobs in the market. He requested support for the Article to improve wages for the support staff who make our school system work.

Ms. Boudman asked how many people are included in this bargaining unit. Chair Deshaies stated 144.

Ms. Boudman asked for the district's lowest paid bus driver's current hourly wage and the wage with the proposed contract. Ms. O'Blenes stated the current wage of \$16.48 or \$17.47 per hour and the new wage for bus drivers next year is \$20.85 for 1 year of experience; \$21.35 for 2 years of experience; \$21.85 for 3 years of experience, and \$22.35 for 4 years of experience.

Ms. Boudman expressed support for this article.

Ms. Conlon asked why there was no pay scale. Chair Deshaies stated that there was a pay scale but not a step and track.

Ms. Conlon questioned not rewarding or paying staff adequately, where the money increase was going, and whether there were other areas where cuts could be made. Chair Deshaies replied that the majority of increases for Article II are for insurance and labor tied to the collective bargaining agreement. He also reminded the assembly that teachers are renegotiating their agreement in the coming year.

Ms. Conlon stated that staff must be paid well and suggested highlighting where the increase in money is going, specific outcomes, and overall experience of students might gain more support from taxpayers. Chair Deshaies stated that 85% of the budget goes to staffing expenses.

Brittany McGuire, District teacher and parent, Wolfeboro, urged support for the article, stating that the support staff covered by the CBA work with some of the neediest students. They support students, they serve food to students, they are custodians and bus drivers. They work one on one and in small groups of intervention, and because of staffing shortages they are constantly pulled to cover for people all over their buildings, doing their work with smiles and exceptional work ethic. She shared that support staff are paid next to nothing and every support staff member she knows works at least two jobs just to get by. She has worked with many support staff for 16 years and they are dedicated and work very hard.

Timothy Bohmiller, Vice President of Support Staff Association, Effingham, thanked the Board for all of their negotiation efforts, for thinking of taxpayers and of employees alike, and urged support this article.

With no further discussion, motion to approve Article V for the ballot as presented; motion seconded; motion passed.

Motion to restrict reconsideration of Article V; motion seconded; motion passed.

Moderator read Article VI.

Article VI: Shall the Governor Wentworth Regional School District, if Article V is defeated, authorize the governing body to call one special meeting, at its option, to address Article V cost items only? The School Board recommends this article. 8-0-0 (Majority Vote Required)

With no discussion, motion to approve Article IV for the ballot as presented; motion seconded; motion passed.

Motion to restrict reconsideration of Article IV; motion seconded; motion passed.

The Moderator granted a ten-minute recess at 12:26 pm.

The Moderator reconvened the meeting at 12:36 pm and read Article VII.

ARTICLE VII: To see if the Governor Wentworth Regional School District will vote to raise and appropriate up to the sum of One Hundred fifty-thousand dollars (\$150,000) to be added to the Maintenance Capital Reserve Fund previously established to maintain and repair schools and furthermore to name the School Board as agents to expend. This sum to come from the June 30, 2025 fund balance available for transfer on July 1, 2025. No amount to be raised from new taxation. The School Board recommends this appropriation. 8-0-0 (Majority vote required)

The moderator recognized Board Member Jim Pittman to address the article.

Mr. Pittman reviewed the history of this Capital Reserve Fund and its use for large, unbudgeted maintenance projects, pointing out that large maintenance projects could overwhelm the regular annual budget. Capital Reserve Funds are carried year to year and maintaining the account is a proactive measure to prepare for any unanticipated issues, such as HVAC replacement. The current balance in the fund is \$187,930.08. Mr. Pittman differentiated between this article and Article VII, explaining that this article is basically a savings account for maintenance projects.

Ms. Boudman asked how much the Board is allowed to expend without putting it to a warrant article and asked for clarification on whether the Board could expend the entire \$187,000. Ms. O'Blenes explained that a public hearing would be required to expend the funds, stating that the Board is the agent to expend and cannot spend more than is in the fund.

With no further discussion, motion to approve Article VI for the ballot as presented; motion seconded; motion passed.

Motion to restrict reconsideration of Article VI; motion seconded; motion passed.

Moderator reads Article VIII:

ARTICLE VIII: Shall the Governor Wentworth Regional School District raise and appropriate the sum of one hundred fifty-thousand dollars (\$150,000) for repairs and improvements of buildings/grounds at the Kingswood Regional High School, Kingswood Regional Middle School, Lakes Region Technology Center, Kingswood Arts Center, Carpenter School, Crescent Lake School, Effingham Elementary School, New Durham School, Ossipee Central School, Tuftonboro Central School, and the SAU 49/Transportation Facility? **The School Board recommends this appropriation. 7-0-0 (Majority vote required)**

The moderator recognized Board Member Jim Pittman to address the article.

Mr. Pittman reviewed this past year's maintenance projects at the various schools in the district. Ossipee Central School replaced a bathroom floor; Carpenter School replaced the kitchen office floor; Crescent Lake School installed a pass-through window, replaced a bathroom floor, and replaced a culvert; Tuftonboro Central School enhanced a sidewalk for increased accessibility and safety; Kingswood Middle School installed an interior main office pass-through wall and exterior pass-through window; and New Durham School replaced windows. Additionally, Carpenter, Crescent Lake and Ossipee Schools received ventilator upgrades and cooling improvements.

Upcoming projects will include Carpenter School playground paving; Tuftonboro Central School roof replacement; Crescent Lake School bathroom floor replacement; Kingswood Middle School plumbing upgrade in the art room; Kingswood High School/Art Center handicap pad replacement; Carpenter School elevator upgrade; and paving of the back parking lot for the Transportation Department. Mr. Pittman recognizes that these projects would not be possible without the dedicated efforts of the facilities and maintenance team who work tirelessly to maintain and improve the facilities across the District.

With no discussion, motion to approve Article VIII for the ballot as presented; motion seconded; motion passed.

Article VIII is restricted from further discussion.

Moderator read Article IX:

ARTICLE IX: Shall the Governor Wentworth Regional School District raise and appropriate \$250,000 to provide funding for free meals to all students within the newly eligible income brackets. This vote would allow the increase of eligibility for free school meals for students within the district by aligning the income threshold with the following federal poverty level options: 300% of the federal poverty rate, significantly broadening eligibility and ensuring free school meals for students from households earning up to three times the federal poverty rate. This funding would support providing free meals to all students within the newly eligible income brackets, ensuring equitable access to nutrition for academic success and well-being. The School Board recommends this appropriation 8-0-0 (majority vote required)

Moderator recognized Board Member Mary Schillereff to address article.

Ms. Schillereff explained the purpose of the article to broaden the income threshold to 300% of the federal poverty level and is important because there is a clear need in the district. She referred to the number of students who received meals that were free to all students during pandemic. She explained that under existing guidelines, many families in the district do not qualify for free or reduced-price meals yet still rely on these meals to help their children succeed in school. She stated that supporting this article is an investment in our students' future and ensures students have access to nutritious meals and do not go hungry during school day, emphasizing that the Board unanimously supports this article.

Ms. King asked for clarification on the process, how many families are accessing meals through Federal program and filled out application, how many more students of 1328 left would be eligible with the new program, how much meal debt exists and who picks up the cost of this debt, how much meal debt remained at the end of last year, how the program will be administered, what the application process will be, what the incentive for families is to go through this burdensome process if they already get free meals, clarification that every parent that makes up to 300% of the poverty level would have to fill out Free and Reduced Lunch Form, if wording should be included in the article, and what happens after the \$250,000 runs out.

Ms. O'Blenes confirmed that 31.74% (or 617 students) are currently enrolled, approved and participating in the District; explained that there is no way to know how many families will fall within the additional dollar threshold until an application is filled out; explained that the district used the number of families accessing free meals during COVID (universally free) to create the proposed figure for the article; stated that the general fund must absorb the debt due to state regulations prohibiting Food Service from carrying such debt; stated that the remaining meal debt for the year ending 2024 was \$15,000, up from \$7,000 in 2018; stated that the District is working with the Bureau of Food and Nutrition (Kelly Rambo), herself, and Superintendent and that if the article is passed an application will be developed with oversight from these departments; stated that the federal application will still need to be filled out and will not go away; stated that the wording should not be changed and that legal counsel helped write article which is approved by the DRA as written.

The moderator clarified that the article can be amended and asked Ms. King if she wished to propose an amendment to the article. Ms. King answered no and stated that her research shows that there is no conclusive correlation between learning outcomes and access to meals except that more meals are received.

Ms. Schillereff described the one-and-a-half-year process that included parent and student input to address this need, and the stigma attached, to produce a plan that gives increased access to more meals for families, encouraging the district to take a leap of faith and do what is right.

Chair Deshaies disagreed with Ms. King's statement, sharing his work with an anti-hunger organization, five years of research that shows that having access to meals does improve learning, adding that meals should be treated as another resource students need.

Ms. King questioned what happens when the \$250,000 is expended. Chair Deshaies confirmed that \$250,000 is the total amount that can be spent per the wording of the article and that the Board is confident this number is adequate, as evidenced by the 8-0 vote in favor of the article.

Kelly Colby-Seavey, New Durham School Principal, resident of Wolfeboro, described the unfortunate reality of a student with an empty lunch box because their parent hasn't filled out application. She shared that the schools make every effort to ensure no student goes without a meal and that two members of her school community came forward to cover lunch debt and donated at Christmas time to cover unpaid meals. Ms. Seavey requested clarification on how "free and reduced" is to be interpreted. Chair Deshaies explained that the article covers different levels based on what children qualify for. Free is at 130% of poverty level then reduced is 130% to 185% and reimbursed at federal rate for reduced. Families will not pay the difference. 185% - 300% of the poverty level is a new level that will allow more children to have access to meals that will be covered by the district if article passes. Students above 300% will still pay for their meals.

Ms. Boudman commented on how much money is saved if students have access to meals and learning is better and the cost savings to taxpayers down the road. Chair Deshaies stated there are intangibles that can't be measured and that as a result of access to meals will result in students who are better equipped to be educated in the classroom, will perform better on assessments, and will also be more productive in society.

Ms. King proposed an amendment to the article to change to the last sentence in article to read "this funding would support free meals to all students within the newly eligibility income bracket as verified through completion of the federal application for free and reduced priced school meals."

Motion made to address amendment to article; motion seconded.

Chair Deshaies opposed the amendment, stating that it is not the role of the legislative body to overstep into the administrative functions of the district.

Ellen Phillips, New Durham, stated that there is a law in NH that enables people that make up to 400% poverty level to receive vouchers to attend private or religious school or conduct home schooling, but there is no law in NH to enable our children to eat lunch at school. This is the failure of legislature, and she is happy to see the school district try to change this.

Ms. King stated that she wants to make sure taxpayers understand that federal funds are tied to the Free and Reduced Meal application and income must be verified by completion of an application. Chair Deshaies confirmed the Free and Reduced Meal application affects reimbursements and state funding, but the district cannot compel families to complete the application. The district will follow USDA laws and rules regarding free and reduced meals to guide district.

Ms. Boudman questioned if the amendment language should include a statement that includes subsidizing 181% to 300%. Chair Deshaies replied that the district is subsidizing the difference in reduced price and that articles should not address specific administrative functions, only the dollar amount and the purpose.

The Moderator read amended article:

ARTICLE IX: Shall the Governor Wentworth Regional School District raise and appropriate \$250,000 to provide funding for free meals to all students within the newly eligible income brackets. This vote would allow the increase of eligibility for free school meals for students within the district by aligning the income threshold with the following federal poverty level options: 300% of the federal poverty rate, significantly broadening eligibility and ensuring free school meals for students from households earning up to three times the federal poverty rate. This funding would support providing free meals to all

students within the newly eligible income bracket as verified through the completion of the federal application for free and reduced meals, ensuring equitable access to nutrition for academic success and well-being.

The Moderator asks for vote on amendment; amendment failed with only one vote in favor.

Ms. Siebel expressed concern about jeopardizing Title One funds.

Ms. Boudman requested to add something to the article to address needy children who will not eat at school. Chair Deshaies states it cannot be added to the article and confirmed that district does not turn any students away from meals at school.

Ms. King encouraged legislators to vote for a bill on the floor so no family has to fill out a form.

Article IX is not amended and is restricted from further discussion.

ARTICLE XI: To transact any other business that may legally come before said meeting.

The moderator turned the meeting over to Chair Deshaies for two additional items of business.

Chair Deshaies recognized Ossipee School Board member Dana Streeter for his contributions as a teacher in the district, beloved by his students, and thanked him for his six years of dedication and hard work on the Board. Chair Deshaies presented a gift to Mr. Streeter as a token of appreciation for his involvement as a community member and for his support of the district as he completes his tenure on the Board.

Chair Deshaies recognized Effingham School Board Member Jim Pittman who has served on board for six years. Jim was pressed into temporary service, thinking his term would be for three months and now it's been six years, serving as vice chair for a time. Chair Deshaies thanked him for his years of service and presented him with a gift as a token of appreciation for his service as he also completes his tenure on the Board.

In closing, Chair Deshaies read the Philosophy of District.

Motion to adjourn the meeting at 1:38 pm; motion seconded; motion passed.

Respectfully submitted,



Michelle J. Capone, School District Clerk