

**MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING
OF THE
DARTMOUTH SCHOOL COMMITTEE**

March 3, 2025

The warrants for bills payable were reviewed and signed by the School Committee.

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Chris Oliver at 6:00 p.m. in the Dartmouth High School Library Media Center.

On a roll call the following members were present: John Nunes, Mary Beckwith, Elizabeth Coughlin and Chris Oliver. Kathleen Amaral was not in attendance.

Also present: Dr. Saba-Maguire, James Kiely and Ms. Genthner.

The Chair announced the meeting is being recorded for future broadcast over DCTV.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Nathan Silva made comments regarding the proposed FY26 budget and stated his reasons why he encourages the Committee not to vote for the budget as it is currently proposed.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mr. Nunes moved, seconded by Ms. Coughlin to approve the Regular Session Minutes of February 10, 2025 as written. The motion passed unanimously: 4-0.

Mr. Nunes moved, seconded by Ms. Beckwith to approve the Executive Session Minutes of February 10, 2025 as written, with the stipulation that they be held until the matters under consideration are resolved. The motion passed unanimously: 4-0.

SPOTLIGHT ON KIDS – Joseph DeMello Elementary School: The Chair invited Dr. Saba-Maguire to introduce tonight's presenters.

Dr. Saba-Maguire invited Elizabeth Correia and Adam Hill, Principal and Assistant Principal of DeMello Elementary School respectively to deliver tonight's *Spotlight* presentation.

Ms. Correia started tonight's *Spotlight* segment highlighting DeMello's addition of three kindergarten classrooms, 60 students and 3 teaching staff; Marygrace Condon, Cheryle Kamm and Melissa Sylvia.

Ms. Correia explained how tonight's presentation is directly linked to the District's Strategic Plan.

Ms. Correia invited Jen Fitton, DeMello's Math Coach, to highlight aspects of the school's math curriculum.

Ms. Fitton provided information about a Dartmouth Education Foundation (DEF) grant she was awarded and how its proceeds are being used to foster math in the school; *videos of students describing “mathematicians” were aired.*

Mr. Hill provided information relative to Focus Area 2 - *Safe and Supportive Schools* - of the District Strategic Plan focusing on DeMello’s “whole school” and “tiered” approach to maintain a safe and supportive learning environment which includes the schools’ student support team: outreach social workers, school nurses and school psychologist.

Liz Voci, DeMello’s Instructional Technology Specialist, explained *Makerspace*, an alternative recess for students created with the proceeds from a grant awarded by DEF.

Robin Kolbeck, a DeMello School Fifth Grade Teacher and Student Council Advisor, described the activities of the 4th and 5th grade student councils this year.

Members of the 4th and 5th Grade Student Councils participated in the segment explaining their work as council members and *Connections Through Community*.

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE REPORT

No report was provided at tonight’s meeting.

CONSENT AGENDA

Dr. Saba-Maguire recommended the following request for the Committee’s review and consent.

- DHS – Youth and Government Club to Attend the Model Government Conference in Boston (April 2025)

Mr. Nunes moved, seconded by Ms. Beckwith to approve the request. The motion passed unanimously: 4-0.

OLD BUSINESS

Proposed FY26 Budget – Further Discussion: Dr. Saba-Maguire provided clarity around the District’s past use of school choice funds and the necessity for the current and the proposed expenditure of school choice funds.

Dr. Saba-Maguire stressed the District and the School Committee are aware school choice funds as they are currently being used and proposed for FY26 is not sustainable adding the District is working to ensure long term stability and is not waiting to the “last minute” to address the fiscal challenges it faces.

Dr. Saba-Maguire stated the District has been discussing its use of school choice funds in order to make everyone aware of the financial constraints the District faces and to seek guidance from the School Committee and the Town in how the District will “bridge the gap.”

Dr. Saba-Maguire stated it is important the community understands school choice funds are being used in the best interest of students.

Mr. Kiely addressed the questions Committee members had at the previous committee meeting referring to a memorandum provided in the meeting packet as well as a presentation highlighting the requested information.

Mr. Kiely explained the information includes realignment of staff positions and resources; comparison of FY26 projected enrollment and FY25 actual enrollment indicating a projected decline in enrollment done by the District as well as supported by information provided by New England School Development Council (NESDEC).

Mr. Kiely stated; of the positions to be realigned, there is one that is currently not through attrition (ie retirement).

Mr. Kiely stated he was asked by a member of the Finance Committee what the District's plan is regarding declining enrollment adding part of the plan is to maintain reasonable class size.

Dr. Saba-Maguire added the District took steps last year to address declining enrollment by moving the Cushman School kindergarten classrooms to the DeMello School which enabled us to protect class size.

Mr. Oliver asked how many positions were reduced last year.

Mr. Kiely responded the District realigned multiple resources last year: 3 elementary teaching positions; 2 ESSER middle school positions that we did not continue and one middle school teaching position; 1 high school teaching position; an elementary specialist teacher; the secretary to the superintendent and a part time secretarial position.

Mr. Oliver asked that that data be provided to the Finance Committee at its meeting scheduled for Thursday.

In response to Mrs. Amaral's request made at the last meeting, Mr. Kiely provided information about what was requested but not funded in the proposed FY26 budget adding that he would not consider this an exhaustive list explaining administrators are being realistic when submitting their requests and are not requesting everything they need.

Mr. Nunes and Mr. Oliver brought up how many of the positions listed are support services which speaks to the "high" needs our student population has.

Ms. Coughlin asked about Education Support (ESP) personnel who support teachers in the classroom.

Dr. Saba-Maguire stated there is not an ESP in every classroom.

Mr. Oliver referred to a slide from the presentation at the previous School Committee meeting noting Dartmouth's ESP count per 100 students is 1.1 below the State average.

Dr. Saba-Maguire added that when administrators ask for additional support they are usually looking to add an ESP to their building.

Mr. Kiely provided additional information to what was presented previously that pertains to the use of school choice funds since its inception in 2017 noting the greatest expenditure was on technology noting that greatly assisted the District during the pandemic; the District did not use school choice funds for staff.

Mr. Kiely stated during the pandemic grant funding for technology was issued by the government which allowed the District to save school choice funds.

Mr. Kiely referred to other information provided in the meeting packet to address questions from the Committee regarding the Human Resources proposal and the Special Education Team Facilitator proposal.

Ms. Beckwith commented on the range of ways school districts across the State “do” human resources noting there is not a model that is consistent and much of it doesn’t make sense; Ms. Beckwith stated she does not know how you have a District “our” size without a professional HR person.

Ms. Coughlin noted the Town has an HR person adding the school department has more personnel adding we need an HR person.

Mr. Nunes offered comments in reference to the DART districts adding it is a needed position.

Dr. Saba-Maguire reminded the Committee that the HR position was in the FY25 budget but, in recognition of the challenge of that budget, we withdrew it adding things haven’t really changed and that is why we include it in this budget noting how the strength of the team at central office has allowed us to function without an HR person.

Dr. Saba-Maguire stated in recognition of another challenging budget cycle, internal conversations have been had to automate some functions because we have very paper driven systems (tracking credits, advancement on the salary scale, tracking professional development submission, etc.) matters not relating to personnel referencing the dual functions of HR adding at this point we are “thinking” we want to try automated support services to see how they impact our operation and that we think it might be best to not put the Human Resource position forward at this time citing the challenge of bringing in positions while eliminating positions.

Mr. Oliver stated his initial hesitancy to remove the position when Dr. Saba-Maguire brought it up at their bi-weekly meeting but thinks it shows the School Department wants to work together with the Town but ultimately believes this will be a position in the future.

Dr. Saba-Maguire provided further reasoning for removing the HR position at this time, reiterated the District’s position that an HR person is needed adding the District wants to be strategic with the Committee about when to bring this position in.

Mr. Nunes provided his reasoning for why he thinks the position should be left in the budget for now.

Ms. Coughlin concurred with Mr. Nunes.

Ms. Beckwith asked if the Town HR person serves all other departments.

Mr. Kiely responded yes.

Mr. Oliver stated the consensus of the Committee is to leave that position on the “table” right now.

Mr. Kiely provided future meeting dates regarding the FY26 budget: Finance Committee on March 6th at Town Hall; Budget Hearing on February 24th at Dartmouth High School; at the following School Committee Meeting the District will ask for the Committee’s vote on the FY26 budget.

Ms. Coughlin asked for clarification regarding budget process specifically moving those positions funded by school choice to the operating budget.

Mr. Kiely responded explaining the process of voting the school’s budget.

Ms. Coughlin asked if it would make sense to move one position over to the operating budget because when we run out of school choice funds we are going to ask the Town for more money.

Mr. Oliver stated he does not know if he will vote yes on this budget right now adding he wants plans in place for the following years; if we are going to use school choice funds for FY26 can we get a written agreement from the other departments in the Town because, come FY28, we are “out of luck.”

Mr. Oliver agreed with Ms. Coughlin comment about moving positions to the operating budget.

Mr. Nunes gave his reasons for wanting to leave the budget the way it is.

NEW BUSINESS

Superintendent’s Update: Dr. Saba-Maguire provided information of work being done in the district that is aligned to the District Strategic Plan as well as current activities and events that are happening.

-Teacher and Learning Update: School Visits; new literacy resource to be fully implemented next fall and input from instructors currently participating in the pilot; Playbook Initiative update.

-Budget and Capital Improvement Update: HR Update – Associate and Assistant Principal vacancies update.

-Family and Community Engagement Update: DHS Orchestra Spain Trip Update.

-Safe and Supportive Schools Update: met with DHS students during Superintendent Advisory.

Report of the Chair: The Chair had nothing further to add.

-Mr. Nunes asked that we apply to the Finance Committee for a reserve fund transfer to be reimbursed for any costs sustained in relation to the Quinn School water “break.”

-Band Update.

Other Matters that may not have been anticipated at the time of Agenda posting:

NEXT MEETING

Next Meeting: The next regular session of the School Committee will take place in the Library Media Center at Dartmouth High School and via live stream at www.youtube.com/dhstvmedia on Monday, March 24, 2025 at 6:00 p.m.

Mr. Nunes moved, seconded by Ms. Beckwith to adjourn at 8:24 p.m. into Executive Session for an update pertaining to pursuant to M.G.L. c. 30A, § 21(a)(3), to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining where an open meeting would have a detrimental effect on the School Committee's bargaining position (Dartmouth Administrators Association, Dartmouth Educators Association and AFSCME) and pursuant to M.G.L. c. 30A, § 21(a)(2), to conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with non-union personnel (Assistant Superintendent of Finance and Operations) and not to return to open session. On a roll call the motion passed unanimously; 4-0.

Respectfully submitted,



June Saba-Maguire, Ed. D.
Superintendent of Schools

Open Session - Documents/Exhibits

Agenda

Brief

Regular and Executive Session Minutes for February 10, 2025

DeMello Spotlight on Kids Presentation

Consent Agenda Item

Proposed FY26 Budget – Additional Information and Presentation