

SEYMOUR BOARD OF EDUCATION

**SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES**

March 24, 2025

7:00 pm

Central Office

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

Chris Champagne, Board Chairperson  
Kristen Bruno, Board Vice Chairperson  
Stephan Behuniak, Board Secretary (7:05)  
Ed Strumello  
Jim Garofolo  
Kristen Harmeling  
Lori Nespoli  
Pete Kubik

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

- A. Pledge of Allegiance - Mr. Champagne called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM

**II. PUBLIC COMMENT**

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

- Called 3 times - no public comment.

**III. CONSENT AGENDA**

- A. Hiring

1. Anthony Lacerenza
  - a. Social Studies Long-Term Substitute
  - b. Seymour High School
  - c. Replacing David Willadsen

**MOTION:** (Kristen Bruno / sec. Jim Garofolo) to approve the consent agenda as presented

**AFFIRMATIVE:** Mr. Champagne, Ms. Bruno, Mr. Strumello, Mr. Garofolo, Ms. Harmeling, Ms. Nespoli, Mr. Kubik

**PASSES:** 7-0-0

**IV. DISCUSSION and POSSIBLE ACTION**

- A. **Possible elimination of French Program at Seymour High School due to enrollment numbers**

1. Mr. Champagne inquired about the current enrollment numbers in the French program. Dr. Compton explained that enrollment has been declining and is no longer sustainable, with only 10-12 students currently enrolled. The French program has faced challenges since the middle school eliminated French several years ago after a teacher retired, which affected the high school program's viability.

Dr. Compton suggested exploring alternative course offerings for French and other foreign languages, particularly for students interested in language options outside of what is currently available. While AP French is offered online, there are limited language options available at Seymour High School at present. Dr. Compton emphasized the need to consider other possibilities to support students' language learning interests.

Dr. Compton clarified that the decision to eliminate the program is not performance-based, but rather due to enrollment numbers. The teacher, who is highly regarded, is aware that the decision is tied to enrollment and not performance. Unfortunately, the teacher does not hold dual certification. Efforts are being made to assist her in finding another position.

Ms. Harmeling remarked that the program's sustainability was always reliant on the middle school feeder program. Ms. Bruno confirmed that Spanish will be the only language offered at Seymour High School, with a possibility of expanding online language courses in the future.

Mr. Champagne suggested introducing world languages at the elementary level to build a stronger foundation.

Mr. Garofolo inquired about the Matthies Foundation and the possibility of applying for a grant to sustain the program for the next year. Mr. Strumello noted that the Matthies Foundation typically funds programs and materials rather than staff but agreed that it could be worth exploring. Dr. Compton acknowledged that the Matthies Foundation has been supportive in the past, and they can try applying again.

**No action required at this time.**

## **B. Possible Non-Renewals for the 2025-2026 School Year**

### **1. Non-Renewal of Tenured School Teacher**

- a. Dr. Compton referred to the letter given to Ms. Cassandra Marinuzzi, emphasizing that this is due strictly to the elimination of the program. Ms. Marinuzzi is an outstanding, dedicated teacher. Her performance has been excellent in all aspects.

**MOTION:** (Ed Strumello / sec. Kristen Harmeling) to accept the recommendation of the Superintendent to terminate a tenured teacher, Ms. Cassandra Marinuzzi, based upon the enrollment numbers, at the end of the 2024-2025 school year in accordance with the provisions of the Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-151. I further move that the Superintendent be directed to communicate this action of the Board in writing to the non-renewed teacher and that the Superintendent of Schools be authorized to respond on behalf of the Board to any request, if required by law, or for other data which may be forthcoming from the teacher and/or his/her representative pursuant to applicable provisions of Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-151

**DISCUSSION:** This is not a de facto elimination of the French program. However, if we do eliminate the program, there would be no need for the current teacher, which would imply there is no recourse for the teacher's position. The Board agreed to proceed with the current motion on the table.

**AFFIRMATIVE:** Mr. Champagne, Ms. Bruno, Mr. Strumello, Mr. Garofolo, Ms. Harmeling, Ms. Nespoli, Mr. Kubik, Mr. Behuniak

**PASSES:**8-0-0

### **2. Non-Renewal of Non-Tenured School Teachers**

- a. One teacher chose not to follow the advice of the Union President or the CEA.

**MOTION:** (Kristen Harmeling / sec. Kristen Bruno) to accept the recommendation of the Superintendent to non-renew, Ms. Glenda Lisko, non-tenured teacher at the end of the 2024-2025 school year in accordance with the provisions of the Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-151. I further move that the Superintendent be directed to communicate this action of the Board in writing to the non-renewed teachers and that the Superintendent of Schools be authorized to respond on behalf of the Board to any request, if required by law, or for other data which may be forthcoming from the teacher and/or his/her representative pursuant to applicable provisions of Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-151

**AFFIRMATIVE:** Mr. Champagne, Ms. Bruno, Mr. Strumello, Mr. Garofolo, Ms. Harmeling, Ms. Nespoli, Mr. Kubik, Mr. Behuniak

**PASSES:**8-0-0

## **C. 2025-2026 Education Budget**

1. At the first meeting, when the Board of Education (BOE) presented the budget to the Board of Finance (BOF), it went well. However, during the last meeting on Monday, the BOF indicated that the BOE was expected to come back with budget cuts two weeks later. There was also some disagreement regarding the proposed budget percentage increases. Specifically, the BOE suggested a 20% increase for health

insurance, while the town was aiming for a 10% increase. The BOF later suggested that the Superintendent's budget was at 5.5%, although it was unclear where this information came from.

Ms. Harmeling clarified that the meeting was public, and there were individuals from the community presenting inaccurate information that was not part of the official budget presentation. She emphasized that while many ideas were discussed, not all of them had been voted on or approved. Ms. Harmeling also stated that the current budget reflects a 7.9% increase, but the BOF is working with a 5.9% increase, and adjustments are necessary.

Mr. Bucci suggested proposing an alternative percentage. While the BOE acknowledges the 5.9% figure, they are unsure how to make it work but will propose a 6.9% increase, reflecting adjustments in lower health insurance premiums.

The Town Hearing will be held on March 25, 2025, and the Town Meeting is scheduled for April 2, 2025. Mr. Champagne expressed concerns about the rising cost of health insurance, as the district is 88% of health insurance premiums, while the town is 96%. The town also offers a buyout for employees who opt out of insurance. For example, if a teacher and a town employee are both married, one takes the insurance for the family, the other employee takes the buyout = the combined cost for that buyout plus insurance can reach \$76,000.

At the meeting, comparisons were made between Seymour and alliance districts like Derby and Ansonia, which receive significantly more funding. It was pointed out that Seymour cannot be compared to those districts due to the disparity in funding.

Everyone is encouraged to attend the meeting on April 2nd to show support. It was also noted that the BOE has no control over shared services contracts, performance reviews, or disciplinary actions. Dr. Compton provided an explanation of why the town needs to cover certain costs, particularly with respect to health insurance premiums. The BOE presented a public budget with a 12% increase for health insurance.

2. **MOTION:** (Kristen Harmeling / sec. Pete Kubik) to revise the BOE proposed budget reflecting the health insurance line item decreasing from 20% to a 12% only, no other changes.

**AFFIRMATIVE:** Mr. Champagne, Ms. Bruno, Mr. Strumello, Mr. Garofolo, Ms. Harmeling, Ms. Nespoli, Mr. Kubik, Mr. Behuniak

**PASSES:** 8-0-0

## V. REPORTS

- A. Chairman's Report: come tomorrow 6:30 at Town Hall for Public Budget Hearing,
- B. Board Member Comments
- C. Superintendent's Report: 6:00 at Town Hall on April 7th

## VI. ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 8:17 PM