



East Greenwich School Committee Meeting

Thursday, March 27, 2025

6:00 pm

Archie R. Cole Middle School, 100 Cedar Avenue, EG

Minutes

Those in attendance

School Committee: Ms. Alyson Powell, Chair; Dr. Eugene Quinn, Vice-Chair; Ms. Clare Cecil-Karb; Mr. Kevin Wright

Absent: Ms. Melissa Larsen, Mr. William Hangan, Mr. Tim Munoz

Additional Attendees: Mrs. Alexis Meyer, Interim Superintendent; Ms. Sarah Courtemanche-O'Brien, Assistant Superintendent; Attorney Andrew Henneous; Mrs. Amy Healey, School Committee Clerk; Mrs. Maggie Baker, Director of Administration

I. Call to Order

Ms. Powell called the meeting to order at 6:05 pm.

II. Pledge of Allegiance

III. Public Comment

IV. Action Items (Discussion and Possible Action)

A. School Committee Approval of RFQ - Superintendent's Search

Mr. Wright reported that the personnel subcommittee met with its additional new members. It was decided to recommend this RFQ in order to ensure the process is well coordinated and moves along quickly.

On a motion by Mr. Wright seconded by Dr Quinn, the Committee voted 4-0 to approve the RFQ.

B. Superintendent Job Posting

On a motion by Mr. Wright, seconded by Dr. Quinn, the Committee voted 4-0 to table this item.

V. Superintendent and Staff Reports (Discussion and Possible Action)

A. Staff Membership on the Curriculum Subcommittee

Mrs. Meyer recommended the faculty membership on the Curriculum Subcommittee.

Teacher Leaders

- Dr. Dana Doucette - Frenchtown Elementary School (K)
- Ms. Renee Haskins - Meadowbrook Farms Elementary School (K)
- Veronica Wright - Hanaford Elementary School (4)

Department Chairpersons

- Patrica Dulac - Mathematics Department Chairperson
- Karen Izzo or Melissa Fallow (Designee) - ELA Department Chairperson/EGHS ELA teacher
- Anne-Marie Flaherty - Guidance Department Chairperson

On a motion by Mr. Wright, seconded by Dr. Quinn the Committee voted 4-0 to approve the appointments to the curriculum subcommittee.

B. FY 26 Budget

Budget Process

Mrs. Meyer explained that tonight is a budget workshop. The budget process began in November and this meeting is a step in the process, but not the final step. At a subsequent meeting the School Committee will vote on a budget to present to the Town. That budget is likely going to have changes and adjustments. There has been a working group of town and school people who have been collaborating on the budget.

Sources of Revenue

Mrs. Meyer said that revenue slide includes an anticipated 4% increase from the Town. The difference column represents things that need to be navigated. \$842,000 was used from fund balance last year and is not available for next year. There are some adjustments from actuals. The other big number is the \$839,381 reduction in state aid. Before any other changes, there is a \$161,386 shortfall.

Federal Grants to Supplement Our Education Programs in FY 26

- Title I
- Title II
- Title IV
- IDEA Part B
- IDEA Pre-School
- Career Technical Education - Secondary

FY 26 Budget Workshop Totals

From what was submitted in the budget workshops, there is a shortfall of \$1,750,244.

Personnel Budget FY 26 Overview

- ★ Proposed budget FY 26 Salaries – \$28,743,984 All benefits \$10,704,116
- ★ Proposed Increase to frozen staff salaries \$153,314 and benefits \$158,091
- ★ Total \$311,405 increase to budget
- ★ Total shortfall including these increases \$2,061,649
- ★ EGEA Teachers - step rolls 1-9
 - ◆ Step increase Salaries: \$362,459, Benefits: \$69,411
 - ◆ Step 10 increase Salaries: \$169,137 Benefits: \$32,390 projected minimum
 - ◆ EGEA ESP NEARI 3% Salaries: \$74,635, Benefits: \$10,322
 - ◆ EG Custodians/Maintenance NEARI 3% Salaries: \$28,152, Benefits: \$3,893
 - ◆ Administration and Support Staff 1% plus contractual - Salaries: \$37,610 benefits increase \$5,828
 - ◆ Pension rate ERS: FY 25 - 15.54 % to FY 26 - 15.10%
 - ◆ Pension rate MERS: FY 25 - 4.90% to FY 26 - 5.18%
 - ◆ Health Insurance - 11.04.% increase
 - ◆ Dental Insurance - 3.94 % decrease
- ★ Approved budget FY 25 Salaries – \$28,459,857 and All benefits 10,072,578
- ★ FY 25 to FY 26 increase – Salaries: \$284,127 All benefits \$631,538
- ★ all benefits includes workers compensation, unemployment, tuitions

Mrs. Baker explained that changes were made to the personnel budget which increased the shortfall to \$2,061.649

Review of FY 26 Personnel Considerations/Request

These positions are partially funded by grants. It was thought that the positions would be moved to the general budget however there may be other grant funds available.

<u>Positions acquired from Perkins and BCSA Grant - end of funding</u>	
<u>Increase position from .70-1.0 FTE:</u>	
.30 MTSS Coordinator (includes benefits)	\$47,196
.29 CTE Performing Arts (includes benefits)	\$32,600
.30 SLP (includes benefits)	\$34,725

Proposed Reduction of Expenses for FY 26

Description	Amount		Description	Amount
Capital Improvements	\$334,000		Professional Dev.: Admin 50%	\$17,500
Technology Hardware	\$125,000		Public Relations	\$16,000
Field Trips	\$121,340		HS Athletics - Swim	\$15,000
Outside Contract Support	\$75,000		COA Donation	\$12,000
Furniture - Districtwide	\$65,000		Equipment - Districtwide	\$10,000
Solar Credits: Electricity	\$50,000		Playground Repairs	\$10,000
Athletics - Cole	\$32,760		Catering	\$5,000
Legal Expense Reduction	\$30,000		Athletics Travel	\$1,000
Supplies (reduction)	\$32,099		Graduation Supplies - Cole	\$1,000
			Total	\$952,699.00

Proposed Reduction of Personnel for FY 26

Description	Proposed cuts FTE to Local Budget	Cost Reduction (including Benefits)	Comments
New hires at lower step due to retirements	3.0.FTE	\$164,384	
Reduce (Teachers) Library Media Specialists	2.0.FTE	\$233,900	Due to retirements
Reduce Art Teacher EGHS	1.0 FTE	\$132,000	Reduction due to Programmatic Changes
K-Teacher	1.0 FTE	\$129,000	Reduced Enrollment
PK Teacher	1.0 FTE	\$115,349	Reduced Enrollment
Reduce Districtwide Paras	4.0 FTE	\$200,000	Enrollment
Assistant Director Special Education	1.0 FTE	\$134,317	Do not fill
Total		\$1,108,950.00	

Mrs. Meyer provided an explanation of the personnel reductions.

FY 26 Budget Workshops Totals

Budget Category	FY 25 Adopted Budget	FY 26 Budget Workshops Requests	Pre Adoption Workshop	Proposed Adjustments
41000 - 43000 REVENUE	\$49,981,716.00	\$49,820,330.00	\$49,820,330.00	House bill #(2025-H 5749) Town is still in budget process
51000: Personnel Services - Compensation	\$28,459,857.32	\$28,743,983.98	\$28,897,296.98	Confirmed resignation, increase FTE, HS schedule
52000: Personnel Services - Benefits	\$10,072,577.68	\$10,704,116.02	\$10,862,208.85	Final rates for Health and Dental insurance Interlocal Trust
			-\$1,108,950.00	(See Next Slide for proposed positions reduced)
53000: Purchased Professional/Tech Svcs	\$2,893,671.00	\$2,821,204.00	\$2,658,444.00	COA, Catering, Legal, Public Relations, PD, Outside Support
54000: Purchased Property Services	\$1,259,602.00	\$1,289,237.00	\$1,264,237.00	Playground Repairs, Athletics
55000: Other Purchased Services	\$5,027,740.00	\$5,132,634.00	\$5,055,934.00	Field Trip Transportation
56000: Supplies, Materials, Textbooks	\$1,611,555.00	\$1,851,838.00	\$1,765,739.00	Supplies by 14% , Solar Credits: Electricity
57000: Property: Building, Equipment, Vehicles	\$443,327.00	\$782,426.00	\$246,426.00	Capital Improvements, Furniture, Technology Hardware Equipment
58000: Dues and Fees	\$213,386.00	\$245,135.00	\$178,994.00	Field Trip Fees
Total:	\$49,981,716.00	\$51,570,574.00 (3.18% increase)	\$49,820,330.00 (0.32% reduction)	
Revenue minus Expenses		-\$1,750,244.00 plus \$311,405 equals -\$2,061,649		Total expenditures of \$51,570,574 plus \$311,405 (increase in salary and benefits) equals: -\$2,061,649.00

The process to identify reductions begins the furthest away from the students. Mrs. Meyer explained the areas identified for reductions.

Many people are working hard to have state aid reinstated; school administration, school committee, town administration, town council, General Assembly representatives.

Ms. Cecil-Karb inquired about the reductions in middle school sports and athletic travel. Mrs. Meyer said that this reduction includes all middle school sports. Ms. Cecil-Karb noted that the donation to COA comes right back to the schools in the form of programming.

Ms. Powell explained the process in identifying the reductions. Although the approach is to reduce expenses furthest away from students, there are cuts that directly impact some groups of students. Mrs. Meyer said that many hours were spent coming up with these identified cuts which is; a difficult process.

Ms. Cecil-Karb said that this is a terrible situation to be in and a difficult conversation to have with all cuts affecting someone. She asked for clarification that the reduction to outside contract support services is due to a change in enrollment. Mrs. Meyer confirmed that it was. Ms. Cecil-Karb pointed out that opportunities outside of the classroom are very important to middle school students. The \$30,000 spent on ice rental for the hockey team is the same amount for all middle school sports. Once again the facilities budget has been dramatically reduced. This is at a time when the buildings are in need of attention.

Mr. Wright said that this is incredibly challenging to see the line items being cut and reduced. Athletics has a big impact on students and outside revenue and resources should be sought out.

Ms. Powell said that these reductions come after years of struggling with the budget. So many of the reductions are those that are targeted year after year. COA dollars do come right back to the District.

Public Comment

Ms. Peggy Chace, Eldredge Library Media Specialist

Ms. Chace has been a full-time, one school librarian for the last twenty-five years. She read a letter from an Eldredge 5th grade student describing how the library has been a part of her education. Ms. Chace explained what she does as the librarian and pondered who would handle immediate needs if the library were to be closed half the week.

Ms. Bethany Gorter, Hanaford Library Media Specialist

Ms. Gorter inquired about the funding of the MTSS Coordinator position. She expressed her concern about the reduction of 2 full-time certified library media specialists positions while a 6 figure administrative position is in the budget. Students will lose out on many services if there is not a full-time librarian. Part time librarians can not develop special, personalized relationships with students. Ms. Gorter urged the School Committee to do what's best for the students and save all teaching and teacher support positions. The reduction of an art position at the high school will result in the loss of an elementary art teacher

Ms. Michelle Steever, EGHS Library Media Specialist

Ms. Steever requested that the decision to reduce two full-time librarian positions be reconsidered. She stated that strong library programs and student achievement are linked. Certified school librarians are an investment in students' future.

Mr. Joe Harwood, EGPS Parent

Mr. Harwood said that he is against any cuts to sports. Schools and all extracurriculars should be funded. The swim team does not deserve to be the only team targeted in cuts. All teams should sacrifice and swim should not be sacrificed because they require a facility that East Greenwich does not have.

Ms. Kerri Bonaccorsi, Hanaford Teacher & Cole Parent

Ms. Bonaccorsi spoke as an educator with deep personal roots in the District. Educators are dedicated to the growth of students. She expressed disappointment in the state of the district and the impact of the budget cuts. Ms. Bonaccorsi asserted that the schools are understaffed and students are not being provided necessary special education

services. She said that she is troubled by the growing administrative staff. Teachers need to be properly supported.

Ms. Eileen Peduto, EGPS Teacher

Ms. Peduto spoke of her family's intentional decision to move to East Greenwich for the quality education. She teaches here because of the dedication of the teachers in the district and the opportunities given to students. Sports are important and specialist teachers are important.

Ms. Renee Haskins, EGPS Teacher & Parent

Ms. Haskins said that the same cycle occurs year after year; the schools are being left behind despite the town being the richest in the state. The district has been chronically underfunded resulting in deteriorating buildings and low paid teachers. Schools are receiving less in real dollars every year. The Town Council has \$10 million in savings and has forced the schools to spend down its savings. The Town has failed to plan and prioritize education. The Town Council needs to go to the General Assembly and secure the funds needed for our students. The Town Council should dip into their \$10 million fund balance. She urged the Town Council to take action before the damage is irreversible. Ms. Haskins said that there should be a town-wide budget planning commission. A significant increase must be made to school funding. The wealthiest town in Rhode Island should not have underfunded schools.

Ms. Debra McMullen, EGPS Teacher - Cole

Ms. McMullen is a lifelong teacher here in East Greenwich and said that she is disappointed to see cuts to athletics. There are kids who thrive through sports and that aids in the classroom.

Mr. Tom Kiang, EGPS & Swim Team Parent

Mr. Kiang called on the swim team and parents to stand up. He said that if cuts to sports have to take place, it should be spread amongst all teams. EG has been a leader in the state's unified swim program. The swim team benefits the students. It is an investment in the students. Mr. Kiang asked that alternative cuts be considered.

Elena Geigenmiller, EGPS Student & Swim Team Member

Elena spoke about her first year as a member of the swim team and the benefits of the sport and being on the team.

Carolina Kiang, EGPS Student and Swim Team Member

Carolina spoke about the effects that the elimination of the swim team would have on her as a varsity swimmer and college candidate.

Sarah Allamby, EGPS Student & Swim Team Member

Sarah explained that the cut of the swim team would take away much from the team members. It is a path to college scholarships and opportunities. She said that the team was willing to work on fundraising and sponsorships.

Alessandra Kiang, EGPS Student

Alessandra said that a cut to the program will take away opportunities for students to become leaders. It is a team that supports one another. She spoke of the accomplishments of the swim teacher members.

Margaret Baumgartner, EGPS Student & Swim Team Member

Margaret said that for many swimmers this is the only team that they participate on. It offers opportunities that would otherwise be lost.

Patrick Gorham, EGPS Student & Swim Team Member

Patrick said that swim is a sport where every individual matters and everyone contributes. Its members support one another.

Ms. Maura Keating, EGPS Parent

Ms. Keating spoke in support of the librarians, as a parent and a librarian. She expressed pride in the swim team members who spoke. Ms. Keating spoke of the benefits that come from readers. Librarians teach skills that help kids be safe on the internet and provide professional development to their colleagues.

Ms. Kat Felkner, EGPS Occupational Therapist

Ms. Felkner said that she loves her job and the students she works with. The core of everything is the students and despite the effort to cut away from students, there is a MTSS Coordinator position. This work is being done at the school level and she questioned the need for a coordinator. She would rather see the hiring of interventionists. The money should be invested elsewhere.

Ms. Leslie Lee, EGPS Teacher

Ms. Lee said that the swim team members will remember their team being eliminated when they recall their high school years. The needs of students are being put behind scores and testing. Paraprofessionals should not be eliminated. She advocated cuts other than staff.

Community Member

The school's motto of "All Means All" is not being applied. There should be a little taken from all sports. Athletics can help students get into college. She raised a concern that eliminating librarians may lead to book banning. Librarians do a wonderful job teaching students about internet dangers.

Ms. Nicole Hurley, EGPS Parent

Ms. Hurley said that her children have gotten so much from East Greenwich Schools, including theatre and athletics. She said that the cut to athletics may lead students to leave the District for private schools. Ms. Hurley asked about tuition to other schools, the cost of which is equivalent to the budget gap.

Mrs. Baker said that these tuitions include CTE programs and charter schools which the district is required by state law to pay for. Additionally, the district must provide transportation to private schools.

Ms. Hurley questioned specific line items where there was a big difference between FY 24 actuals and FY 26 budgeted. She suggested that the district provide before and after school care. She also recommended a reduction in bus monitors.

Ms. Donna Morris, Hanaford Teacher

Ms. Morris announced that she is retiring this year. While budget cuts will not directly affect her, it does affect education. She disagreed with the statement that our schools are fully staffed. She urged School Committee members to spend a day in a school and experience what the teachers experience. Ms. Morris said that there are not enough paraprofessionals on site to adequately supervise large numbers of students.

Ms. Christine Carr, Frenchtown PE Teacher

Ms. Carr said that teachers build relationships with students. She spoke of knowing each child in the building. Librarians are a hub in the school and sports are a safety for many students.

Ms. Caitlin Wotherspoon, EGPS Teacher

Ms. Wotherspoon praised the swim team students for speaking tonight. The relationships that develop are so important. She expressed concern that we could lose students to other schools. She pondered whether librarian positions could be grant funded. Ms. Wotherspoon read a poem that she has written about the current situation in the district.

Mr. Peter Carney, EGPS Parent via Zoom

Mr. Carney thanked Mrs. Meyer for returning to the district. Mr. Carney spoke of the hiring of Dr. Ricca and his contract renewal. He said that those actions were bad decisions and a failure of leadership by the School Committee at a cost to the district. Mr. Carney spoke about Dr. Ricca's employment pattern and its financial impact.

Ms. Denise Lopez

Ms. Lopez urged everyone to work with the League of Cities and Towns on the issue of state aid and cautioned that no amount is guaranteed. People rally when budget cuts are proposed. Ms. Lopez questioned the need for an assistant superintendent and suggested that budget cuts be made to the top positions.

Ms. Sabrina Weitz, via Zoom

Ms. Weitz asked for more detail on some of the budget categories. She advocated for investing in teachers rather than in more technology

Daragh Gammel, EGPS Student & Swim Team Member

Daragh spoke of the benefits of being on the swim team. He said that it is not right to cut just one team; the reductions should be across all sports.

Ms. Powell thanked everyone who came tonight and those who got up to speak. Their participation is appreciated. These cuts are all difficult and every one is important. The District is not running on extras. The administration was directed to develop a balanced budget with no reliance on fund balance. Some of these proposed cuts do not affect students equitably. Ms. Powell asked that the administration look to reallocate with that in mind. Perhaps fund balance, the little that is left, can be used.

Ms. Cecil-Karb asked for an explanation of fund balance. Ms. Powell said that it is a savings account of sorts. There is no revenue source of replenishment for that account. It needs to be spent only on one time, emergency expenses. Some of the program cuts could be viewed as emergencies.

Ms. Felkner asked whether there is also consideration of cutting things such as the MTSS Coordinator position. Mrs. Baker said that the position was previously grant funded. This is the first year when the district would cover part of that expense. Ms. Powell said that changes in these numbers are happening each day and there may be an opportunity to sustain that position with another grant.

A member of the audience asked what is the current fund balance. Mrs. Baker replied that it is an unaudited number, approximately under \$600,000.

A member of the audience asked whether Ms. Powell could guarantee that the swim team would be restored. Ms. Powell and Mrs. Meyer said that the budget continues to develop. The obtaining of grant funds for positions may free up money to fund the swim team.

A member of the audience asked when the final budget will be known. Mrs. Meyer said that a budget would come back to the School Committee next week.

Mr. Chris Boie, EGPS Teacher

Mr. Boie said that the Town has a \$10 million fund balance while the school only has \$600,000. Mr. Boie asked the Town to help the schools pay the bills. The schools have been underfunded for decades. The shortcomings of the Town's allocation of funds to the school system has harmed this and previous budgets.

East Greenwich Taxpayer

A woman asked what the impact to taxpayers and the bond rating would be if the Town provided additional funding to the schools.

Dr. Quinn spoke about how a previous town council insisted that the town could not afford any more for the schools. We got to where we are with an average of 1% increase over 11 years. This town council has worked to repair some of this damage. The Town has pledged a 4% increase for FY 26. Both sides are now working collaboratively to solve the financial problems. East Greenwich is unfortunately the one community that got such a large reduction in state aid. The tax impact of \$15,000 for a median valued home is \$0.20 a month.

Ms. Cecil-Karb said that this is a financial gap that is difficult to fill. She pointed out that the “town money” is money that belongs to the taxpayers. There needs to be an allocation of the money that belongs to all.

Mr. Wright said that it is challenging to consider using fund balance when its balance is so low. He does not want to zero out the swim team or Cole athletics. Mr. Wright inquired whether it is possible to seek out alternative funding sources. The lowering of the fund balance exposes the District to not having funds available for unexpected expenses.

Ms. Cecil-Karb said that public schools are not designed to be revenue generating. Ms. Powell said that sustainable funding sources are needed. Mr. Wright concurred that the fund balance is not a sustainable source of revenue.

Dr. Quinn said that building up the fund balance would have to be worked out between the schools and the town. He offered his opinion that the current fund balance is somewhat healthy.

Ms. Powell said that this budget problem is not the fault of poor planning or expenditures but is a result of a large decrease in state aid.

Mr. Wright asked about the projected balance at the conclusion of FY 25 - as much as \$400,000. Mrs. Baker cautioned that expenses can greatly change but she is cautiously optimistic.

Ms. Powell said that the initial directive asked for a balanced budget without the use of fund balance. She asked whether the Committee would like to alter the directive with the fund balance provision removed. She asked Dr. Quinn for his opinion of how much of the fund balance could be utilized. Dr. Quinn suggested a 7-8% of the fund balance; to be determined by the Superintendent and Finance Director.

The directive of the School Committee is for the administration to review the budget without the restriction of using fund balance with a priority to restore items that directly impact specific student groups.

VI. Adjournment

On a motion by Dr. Quinn, seconded by Mr. Wright, the Committee voted 4-0 to adjourn the meeting at 9:04 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Amy J. Healey
School Committee Clerk

Approved 4-8-25