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**BERLIN-BOYLSTON REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE
BUDGET HEARING**

Tuesday, March 11, 2025, 5:00 pm
Tahanto Regional Middle/High School
Auditorium

Revised 3/7/2025 at 9:15am

Stream link <https://www.youtube.com/@bbrsdlive2893/streams>

This meeting may be recorded, and your image or voice may be broadcast.

Due to technical issues this meeting may not always stream live, but we will make every attempt to do so and to record the meeting for future posting.

The items listed on the agenda may be discussed out of order as the Chair decides due to potential scheduling and timing requirements.

Present: School Committee: Mr. Michael Totman, Chair, Mrs. Meagan Grill, Vice-Chair; Mrs. Lori Hart, District Clerk, Mrs. Jessica Deglialberti, Mrs. Lisa Mair, Mrs. Elisabeth Mancini

Administration: Mr. Albert G. Ganem Jr., Interim Superintendent; Ms. Nicole Bilotta, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent, Mr. John Campbell, Berlin Memorial Principal; Ms. Jannel Fitzpatrick, Director of Pupil Personnel Services; Mr. Aaron Osborne, Director of Finance and Operations; Ms. Lisa Sequeira, Tahanto Middle/High School Principal; Mr. Joseph Sposato, Interim Director of Technology; Ms. Sally Stukuls, Director of Curriculum and Grants 6-12;

Also Present: Members of the Public

- I. Call to Order** - Mr. Michael Totman called the meeting to order at 5:00pm and noted the public comment sign in sheet.
- II. Pledge of Allegiance**
- III. Consent Agenda - Vote Needed - Motion to approve the consent agenda made by Mrs. Meagan Grill and seconded by Mrs. Lori Hart, All in favor, Vote 6-0, motion passes.**
 - Warrants

IV. Tracy Novick (MASC) -

- Discussion of Interim Superintendent Next Steps - Ms. Tracy Novick shared with the group there will be a two part superintendent search process. Part one will be an interim search and part two will be a permanent replacement in the fall. She will be back on May 13 with the fall schedule. Ms. Novick went over a proposal for next steps. The position will be posted on the MASC website and on school spring by the end of the week. The deadline for interim applications will be for Friday, April 4th. The applications will not be confidential because it's an interim position and needs to happen before the end of the year. What that means is the resumes can go directly to the committee in a dropbox folder. There will be an evening for interviews the week before April break to make a decision. She will work with Mr. Totman to determine what questions will be used for the interviews. Ms. Novick reviewed the proposed posting. - **Vote position description A motion to accept the position posting as presented by Tracy Novick was made by Mrs. Meagan Grill and seconded by Mrs. Jessica Deglialberti.** Discussion: Mrs. Deglialberti was concerned about having a meeting the week before break. **Mrs. Jessica Deglialberti made motion to amend motion to set the interview of April 15th evening at 5pm seconded by Mrs. Lisa - All in favor Vote 6-0, amendment passes - org motion all in favor, Vote- 6-0 original motion passes.**

V. School Committee Chair Report - Mr. Michael Totman

- **Tahanto Parking Lot Expansion Sub Committee** - On February 28th the district and a few school committee members met with members of DCR, Senator Kennedy, Senator Kilcoyne about expanding parking. Mr. Totman thanked Boylston Selectman, Mr. Matthew Mecum, for driving the process. They spoke about potential areas and potential issues and the process. Mr. Mecum was designated as the point person and will report back to the full school committee on a quarterly basis. The first step is to submit a sketch. Mrs. Deglialberti also wanted to also be on the committee.

Mr. Totman thanked the administration and budget subcommittee for their hard work on the budget. He also thanked Mr. Ganem and Mr. Osborne for their work with Central Office. He thanked Mrs. Grill for her work on the budget subcommittee.

Mr. Totman reviewed the ground rules for the hearing and let people know how to sign in for public comment.

He wanted to clarify that taxpayers of one town are not specifically paying for an elementary school of another town. Mr. Osborne would review parts of the regional agreement and how the growth of the towns has been influencing that. No one on the committee believes that any town taxpayers dollars can be used to pay the other town's elementary school costs outside of what the regional agreement specifies.

Additionally, Mr. Totman wanted to clear up some district wide costs that get spread. Mr. Osborne would go into more detail, but it is based on the number of students. Based on those percentages some years Berlin may pay more but it ebs and flows. Capital costs are calculated differently than operating costs. The debt for Tahanto is a fixed rate bond, but because of the split with capital it creates a variable bond. That could be why it is seen differently from year to year.

After the budget presentation public comment would be held to allow for some potential questions to be answered. Mr. Totman understands that last year was a mess. He has reached out to both towns to see what they could do differently and he has done everything he can to fix the communication issues. No comments relating to last year could be made, only regarding the FY26 budget.

VI. FY26 Budget Hearing Presentation - Mr. Albert Ganem and Mr. Aaron Osborne

- Budget available for viewing 48hrs prior to meeting, at BBRSD.org - Mr. Ganem thanked everyone for their hard work on the budget including principals, directors, school committee, the towns, Mr. Aaron Osborne, Mr. Joseph Sposato and Mr. Kyle Paquette. Over the next 45 days town meetings would take place. BBRSD has meetings with the Boylston Finance Committee on March 17th with the Berlin Finance Committee on March 19th.

In the budget there are some reductions taking place. Mr. Ganem noted how difficult these decisions were to make. For every decision they looked at how it would impact the students. At this time he has still not had individual conversations with staff and would not be going into that detail in the presentation. The number one priority is providing high quality instruction and keeping the students safe.

Mr. Osborne noted one month from the budget hearing would be the opening of Beetlejuice Junior and encouraged everyone to attend. The budget is no longer level service. Some cuts have had to have been made. Assessments are going up, but budgets are going down. After DESE involvement this year the committee had to go with the budget number they voted. For FY26 Mr. Osborne added a district office/district wide cost center. Each school is its own cost center run by the school principals. In no way did this change the assessment to the towns.

Mr. Osborne noted some of the budget line items that were consistent with section 6a line 1 of the regional agreement. He explained each school budget by line item slides and that there are notes next to some of them with further explanation. Mr. Osborne reviewed a pie chart to show a visual of the areas of the costs to the district. The regional agreement does not speak to district cost allocations. Mr. Osborne reached out to Mr. Bob Conroy who was at BBRSD when the plan was created. The cost percentages are 25% 25% 50%.

Mr. Osborne explained the offsets that help lower the assessments to the town. Major categories are school choice, circuit breaker, and IDEA grant funds. The direct offsets are \$2,313,044. What school choice entails was reviewed. It allows families to enroll children in schools in communities other than where they live. The town receives money for incoming school choice and pays for students in the towns that school choice out of district.

Circuit breaker is a financial assistance program for public school districts to offset the cost of delivering high-cost special education services to students. The district has to pay \$54k upfront before they get any reimbursement. Anything beyond that amount gets reimbursed at 75% reimbursement. The district has to wait until the following year to receive those reimbursements.

The IDEA grant provides funds to ensure that eligible students with disabilities receive a free and appropriate public education that includes special education and related services designed to

meet their individual needs in the least restrictive environment. The district is doing their best to allocate those funds in an equitable manner.

Mr. Osborne reviewed the assessment offsets and provided explanations for how they are used, which are Chapter 70 education aid, chapter 71 transportation reimbursement, medicaid reimbursement, and interest income. There has never been 100% school transportation reimbursement. One of the challenges with transportation is the towns do not have sidewalks to allow for the opportunity to not provide transportation to students living closer than a mile and a half. The district has to make sure every student has a seat on the bus no matter what time of the year.

The Regional Agreement is silent to medicaid reimbursement and interest income. Mr. Osborne explained the minimum local contribution and its impact to the budget. It is determined by the state for each town based on the town's property values and personal income reported to the department of revenue. A five year moving average is used.

The major drivers were reviewed for Berlin Memorial, which included salaries, employee health, retiree health, homeless transport, SPED transportation, electricity, and tuition and fees. Salaries and health insurance costs were a big portion of the budget drivers. The Berlin cuts and savings included eliminating contracted paras, staff reductions/reallocations, collaborative tuitions(using circuit breaker), SPED transportation(changing needs). The contracted paras come at a much higher cost than a direct hire and the district plans to eliminate them. Mr. Osborne has done a thorough analysis of the circuit breaker to use some of those funds. Some of the SPED cost transportations change when students go up to Tahanto.

The operating assessment for Berlin for FY26 was reviewed. Totaling \$4,512, 926. Boylston had very similar drivers to Berlin Memorial to include health insurance , retiree health insurance regular transportation, SPED transportation and SPED tutions. The cuts for BES include eliminating contracted paras, staff reductions/reallocations, health insurance(using school choice), and SPED transportation(changing needs).

The BES operating assessment was reviewed to total \$4,945,234. The drivers for Tahanto included salaries, employee health, retiree health, SPED transportation, private SPED tuitions, and collaborative tuitions. Salaries have gone up due to student moves into the school. Savings included eliminating contracted paras, staff reductions/reallocations and private SPED tuitions (Using Circuit Breaker) for a total of \$340,288. Mr. Osborne explained the allocation of the Tahanto Operating Costs. The Tahanto operating assessment for FY26 totalled \$11,273,805.

The Tahanto operating assessment portion for Berlin totalled \$8,7371,867, which is a \$570,992 change.

The Tahanto operating assessment portion for Boylston totalled \$12,360,097 which is a \$487,374 change.

The debt and capital costs were discussed and how the regional agreement plays into it. There are two bonds on the Tahanto building that have a little while left until they retire. The debt schedules have been provided to each of the two towns.

Mr. Osborne discussed the BMS capital requests by priority at a total request of \$1,310,919. The elevator controls will become an ADA compliance issue and it's a significant priority to the district.

BES capital request totalled \$216,500 with the top priorities being repairing the hot water pump and window repairs. The roof project is not included since they are already working with MSBA on it.

The Tahanto capital request totalled \$986,633 with the top priority being middle school furniture, which is too small for some of the students. There are items for the auditorium that have been pushed down the line that need to be replaced.

The FY26 capital costs for Berlin totalled \$2,213,446 and totalled \$1,846,256 for Boylston. Mr. Osborne reviewed the total assessment number for Berlin when added all together which totalled \$10,585,313, for a 25.39% increase, which they understand is not amenable.

The assessment number for Boylston all together totalled \$14,206,353, for a 8.53% increase.

Mr. Ganem and Mr. Osborne wanted to give the community a good idea of what the budget looks like. He also noted they are in contract negotiations with the teachers, which is a huge piece of the budget and is unknown at this time.

VII. Public Comment -

- Ms. April Steward, Boylston Town Administrator mentioned there is a link to an ADA grant that might help with elevator
- Ms. Mary Porter, Berlin Finance Committee member thanked Mr. Osborne for this clarity and transparency. She mentioned the revenues and what the district does with them. Ms. Porter also noted high net school spending over the state.
- Mr. Howard Drobner, Boylston Finance Committee Chair thanked Mr. Osborne for the communication this year and the type of breakdowns provided. Boylston will work with the capital items at the elementary level.

Motion includes capital for both towns.

VIII. Business Items

- **Approval of FY26 Budget - Vote Needed - Mrs. Lori Hart motioned that the Berlin-Boylston School Committee vote to approve a FY26 Operating budget of \$24,393,973 and a FY26 Capital budget of \$4,059,702 resulting in total assessments of \$10,585,313 to the Town of Berlin and \$14,206,353 to the Town of Boylston seconded by Mrs. Meagan Grill, Discussion:** Mrs. Degliaberti thanked Mr. Ganem, Mr. Osborne, and the budget subcommittee. The budget from the hearing can always go down, but it cannot go up. The district is looking for a number to start with. Mr. Osborne explained his reasoning for using the school choice items and potential E&D, and circuit breaker. Mrs. Degliaberti asked if they think the IDEA grant could be threatened. The BBRSD administration is unsure at this time and have not received any word on it yet. It would be a big change for districts if it were to happen. Mrs. Mair asked if they put more school choice in would it impact the cost to the taxpayers. Mr. Osborne said it would but using

those funds may not be conducive and he would want to further talk to the school committee. There could be unknowns that come up and they may want to make sure they have funds available. Mr. Totman noted for the BMS operating assessment last year they applied additional school choice funds, but comparing the total for this year if they had not used it would have had a lower increase this year. Mrs. Degliaberti explained the cuts include FTEs being cut from each school. Mr. Osborne noted the significant increase in the health insurance costs and its effect on the budget.

Vote - Roll call - Mrs. Lori Hart, Mrs. Meagan Grill, Mrs. Elisabeth Mancini, Mrs. Lisa Mair, Mrs. Jessica Degliaberti, Mr. Michael Totman - All Aye- Vote 6-0, motion passes.

Mr. Ganem thanked the school committee and the towns and will continue work on the budget.

- IX. Executive Session and will not return to open session - Motion to enter Executive Session and not return to open session** pursuant to Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 30A, Section 21(a), Purpose (3), to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining (BBEA CBA) if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining position of the public body and the chair so declares **made by Mrs. Meagan Grill and seconded by Mrs. Lori Hart, Roll Call - Mrs. Lori Hart, Mrs. Meagan Grill, Mrs. Elisabeth Mancini, Mrs. Lisa Mair, Mrs. Jessica Degliaberti, Mr. Michael Totman - All Aye, Vote 6-0, motion passes and entered into executive session at 6:52pm.**

X. Upcoming Meeting

- March 25, 2025 Meeting - As needed

The listing of items is those reasonably anticipated by the Chair which may be discussed at the meeting. Not all items listed may, in fact, be discussed and other items not listed may also be brought up for discussion to the extent permitted by law.

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