

GREATER LOWELL TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL

SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING & PUBLIC HEARING

March 20, 2025 – 5:00 P.M.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Sheehan called the Public Hearing to order at 5:00 p.m.

Chairman Sheehan announced that Committeeman LeMay would be participating in the meeting remotely.

ROLL CALL

Members

Present: Mr. Nocco, Mr. Gitschier, Mr. Morin, Mr. Richardson, Mr. Sheehan

Members Absent: Mr. Hogan (absent @ roll call - arrived @ 5:08 p.m.), Mr. LeMay (absent @ roll call – arrived remotely @ 5:02 p.m.), Mr. Bahou (absent @ roll call - arrived @ 5:17 p.m.)

Also

Present: Jill Davis, Superintendent-Director
Michael Barton, Assistant Superintendent/Principal
Michael Knight, School Business Administrator
Greg Haas, Director of Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment
Recording Secretary

MOTION: by Mr. Gitschier, seconded by Mr. Nocco to open the Public Hearing.

ROLL CALL VOTE: 5 Yes, 3 Absent (Mr. Hogan, Mr. LeMay, Mr. Bahou)

School Business Administrator Michael Knight began by informing the members that Superintendent Davis, along with himself, would be presenting the FY26 budget as discussed with the Budget & Finance Sub-Committee with their feedback from the meeting that occurred on February 13, 2025. Mr. Knight informed the committee that a vote cannot be taken on the budget as it is presented at tonight's meeting because the Excess and Deficiency has not been certified by the Department of Revenue currently. He added that, while he works through that process with the Department of Revenue, a vote cannot be taken for the use of \$425,000 of Excess and Deficiency in this budget and associated expenditures. Mr. Knight noted that he hopes to have it worked out by the next meeting and will make a budget amendment, at which time will notify the towns of the change to the budget and continued on with the process as presented tonight.

Superintendent Davis began by informing the subcommittee that the preliminary budget was developed based on the Governor's House Budget Proposal, as well as data and input from administrators, teachers, parents, and community partners and centered around improving student achievement in order to develop confident learners and skilled workers.

Ms. Davis reminded the members that the Massachusetts House, Senate and Governor approved a change in the state funding formula for public education in 2015. The bill provided an investment of \$1.5 billion into schools over six (6) years (originally seven years but was reduced to six years last year) and is currently going into year 5. This bill is aimed at tackling inequity, specifically for school districts with higher percentages of low-income students, English Language Learners and Special Education students in order to close the achievement gap. There is currently a \$646,793 increase to Chapter 70 Aid, with the budget being recommended to the committee of \$59,120,802 which includes more than \$1,588,216 in additional spending which is 2.96% increase over this year's budget.

The base rate for a vocational student was increased by \$493.96, the rate for a special education student was increased by \$780.72 and the rate for ELL students was increased by \$354.41. Also noted was the low-income percentage (currently at 54.11% – down from 56.2%) which places us in category 10; receiving \$7,815.03, which is an increase of \$651.44.

Superintendent Davis continued with the new rates of pupil expenditures set by the state and our current enrollment; the Foundation Budget increased by \$1,601,510, which is a 2.99% increase over this year's budget. She added that this amount is all net school spending required funding.

Superintendent Davis and Mr. Knight spoke briefly on the revenue budget consisting of Excess and Deficiency, Assessment to the Towns, and State Aid. Mr. Knight noted that the proposed revenue sources in the presentation includes the Excess & Deficiency amount of \$425,000 which will be removed from the budget, motion and vote tonight because it needs to get approved and certified by the Department of Revenue ahead of time, but assessments which include the minimum contribution, transportation and debt assessments of \$18,865,202 for an increase of \$230,913. Although the increase appears significant; the minimum contributions alone would have increased \$914,423; however, excess transportation funds previously put into a revolving account were used to offset this year's budget, resulting in a \$770,000 offset. Mr. Knight noted that the towns know that it is anticipated to be tacked back on to next year's budget, barring there are any great increases to the transportation reimbursement this year. He does not anticipate the transportation reimbursement will be as healthy as it was in previous years. Mr. Knight reviewed the figures of Chapter 70 Aid in the amount of \$38,330,600, which increased by \$683,409 and transportation holding flat to give us a total budget \$59,120,802 if we had been able to use Excess & Deficiency. Where that cannot be used until approved, the actual budget amount will be \$58,695,802.

Ms. Davis informed the members that the assessment to the towns includes an increase of \$230,912 from last year; with the City of Lowell's assessment decreasing and the Town of Dracut's assessment increasing, adding this was largely due to the increase of Dracut student enrollment numbers.

Superintendent Davis reviewed the proposed budget priorities as follows, detailing the priorities in each of the following areas:

- Enhancing Curriculum and Instruction

- Maintaining Class Size and Course Flexibility
- Supporting Student Success and Family Engagement
- Investing in Educational Technology and Industry Alignment
- Providing Professional Development for High-Quality Instruction

Mr. Knight spoke regarding the proposed FY26 expenditure budget; noting the proposed preliminary budget of \$59,120,802 represents an increase of \$1,139,322, which is a 1.9% increase. He added that instructional and academic/technical spending continues to dominate the budget expenditure. It also included funding to OPEB, but will need to be put on hold as that was included in the Excess & Deficiency and will need to wait until a proposed budget amendment.

Mr. Knight reviewed non-personnel notable expenditures which include supplies/equipment texts, transportation reduction using reimbursement carried over, fringe benefits & retirement reduction, and a reduction to the Plant Services Department budget.

Superintendent Davis continued with reviewing the proposed personnel expenditures. The first was regarding a stipend in the amount of \$7,195 for the Construction & Transportation CTE Chair due to the increase of responsibilities as a result of the reorganization of departments, which includes the addition of two departments to the cluster. Moving to the next item, Superintendent Davis noted that due to the increase in athletics, including unified sports and flag football, she was proposing to hire additional coaches as follows: one (1) Flag Football Varsity Coach, one (1) Flag Football Asst. Varsity Coach, and one (1) Flag Football JV Coach. The last item for personnel expenditures pertained to the salary adjustment of the two (2) veteran Special Education Worksite Aides, which are noncontractual positions, totaling \$10,000 (\$5,000 each aide).

Mr. Knight spoke regarding the next slide to use Excess and Deficiency in the amount of \$425,000; however, re-noted the inability to use this until we get certified through the Department of Revenue. Expenses included the following: Medicaid Filing, Capital Building Projects, Capital Vehicle Purchases, and OPEB contribution and are currently not going to be voted into this budget. Once certified, Mr. Knight anticipates amending the budget, notifying our towns and then including those to our final operating budget for FY26.

Superintendent Davis and Mr. Knight provided a summary of the proposed FY26 budget as follows: The preliminary FY26 total budget would be \$59,120,802, which is a 2.99% increase over FY25.

Operating Budget	55,600,722
Transportation	2,241,800
Debt Service	1,253,280
OPEB	25,000

The preliminary FY26 Budget assessment would be:

Min. Local Contribution	16,870,122	Chapter 70	38,330,600
Transportation Assessment	741,800	Chapter 71 (transportation)	1,500,000
<u>Debt Assessment</u>	<u>1,253,280</u>	<u>Excess & Deficiency</u>	<u>425,000</u>
Total Assessment	18,865,202	Total Budget	59,120,802

Superintendent Davis added that the Excess & Deficiency would be removed (\$425,000) from the budget vote; therefore, the total budget voted on will be \$58,695,802.

Chairman Sheehan asked if there were any public participants wishing to speak on the FY26 budget. With none present, Chairman Sheehan announced the vote on the FY26 Budget would take place during the regular School Committee meeting at 6:30 p.m. and asked for a motion to close the Public Hearing.

MOTION: by Mr. Hogan, seconded by Mr. Gitschier to close the Public Hearing at 5:30 p.m.

ROLL CALL VOTE: 8 Yes

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Sheehan called the school committee meeting to order at 6:31 p.m. following a recess after the Public Hearing.

Chairman Sheehan stated Committeeman LeMay will be participating at tonight's meeting remotely.

ROLL CALL

Members

Present: Mr. Hogan, Mr. LeMay (remote), Mr. Nocco, Mr. Gitschier, Mr. Bahou, Mr. Morin, Mr. Richardson, Mr. Sheehan

Members Absent: None

Also

Present: Jill Davis, Superintendent-Director
Michael Barton, Assistant Superintendent/Principal
Michael Knight, School Business Administrator
Greg Haas, Director of Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment
Recording Secretary

PUBLIC APPEARANCE

There was no public appearance.

SCHOOL COMMITTEE COMMUNICATIONS

There were no School Committee communications

REPORT OF STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE

Student Representative, Tyler Phath Kano provided an update of recently held clubs and sporting events.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOTION: by Mr. Gitschier, seconded by Mr. Richardson to approve the minutes from the meeting of February 13, 2025.

ROLL CALL VOTE: 8 Yes

REPORT OF DISTRICT TREASURER

MOTION: by Mr. Morin, seconded by Mr. Gitschier to waive the reading of the warrant.

ROLL CALL VOTE: 8 Yes

MOTION: by Mr. Bahou, seconded by Mr. LeMay to approve expenditures for the sum of \$6,505,717.52 allocated as follows:

Warrant 2140B	dated 02/21/2025	Payroll # 995	1,540,449.63
Warrant 2141M	dated 03/07/2025	Payroll # 2141M	527.54
Warrant 2141A	dated 03/07/2025	Payroll # 997	1,297,552.22
Warrant 2141B	dated 03/21/2025	Payroll # 999	1,397,230.17
Warrant 2140-1	dated 02/28/2025	Accounts Payable	696,634.22
Warrant 2141-2	dated 02/28/2025	Mass Bay Health	794,212.75
Warrant 2141	dated 03/14/2025	Accounts Payable	773,510.92
Warrant 2141-3	dated 03/14/2025	Sales Use/Meals Tax	2,382.01
Warrant 2141-4	dated 03/14/2025	Lowell Five Cr Card Fees	3,218.06

ROLL CALL VOTE: 8 Yes

REPORT OF GENERAL COUNSEL

There was no report of general counsel.

REPORT OF SUPERINTENDENT-DIRECTOR

Superintendent Davis notified the Committee that this year's 'Day on the Hill' is scheduled for Tuesday, May 6, 2025 at the State House in Boston and asked if any members were interested in attending to notify her.

Superintendent Davis informed the committee that the Cooperative Education report provided indicates 254 senior students participating in the program as of the end of February, representing 45% of the Class of 2025 and 14 Junior students, representing 2.6% of the Class of 2026. Ms. Davis provided an update, that as of the night of the meeting, there were 258 senior students (out of 562) participating in Co-Op which is 46% of the class of 2025 and 30 junior students (out of 547) participating in Co-Op which is 5% of the class of 2026.

Superintendent Davis asked for the Committee's approval to accept the donation of a 2013 Audi A4 4-door sedan with an estimated valued cost of \$5,000 from a local community member and current

Marketing Instructor, Ms. Stacey Sawyer. Ms. Davis added the vehicle will be used in the Automotive Technology program for educational training, and once completed, disposed of in such a manner that the components cannot be used or sold.

MOTION: by Mr. Hogan, seconded by Mr. Richardson to accept the donation of a 2013 Audi A4 4-door sedan.

ROLL CALL VOTE: 8 Yes

Superintendent Davis asked Assistant Superintendent/Principal Michael Barton to join the meeting to provide information regarding four (4) out-of-state travel requests, adding that each need approval by the Committee.

Assistant Superintendent/Principal Barton began with the first request pertaining to electronics instructor – Mr. Williams to attend instructor certification for IPA-J standard electronics soldering taking place in Manchester, NH. He noted that we are one the few high schools in the country that offer this certification and the approximate cost of the professional development training would be \$3,655.44.

MOTION: by Mr. Hogan, seconded by Mr. Gitschier to approve the out of state travel request for Electronics Instructor – Glenn Williams to attend the instructor certification training in Manchester, NH from April 7-10, 2025.

ROLL CALL VOTE: 8 Yes

Assistant Superintendent/Principal Barton continued with the second request which was for electronics instructor – Ms. Knight to attend instructor re-certification for IPA-J standard electronics soldering taking place in Manchester, NH. Mr. Barton added that the approximate cost of the professional development training would be the same as the previous request at \$3,655.44.

MOTION: by Mr. Bahou, seconded by Mr. Hogan to approve the out of state travel request for Electronics Instructor – Ms. Knight to attend the instructor re-certification training in Manchester, NH from May 7-8, 2025.

ROLL CALL VOTE: 8 Yes

Assistant Superintendent/Principal Barton invited Coach Cassidy to speak on behalf of the request to attend the National Wrestling Championship in Virginia Beach. He added the cost of the trip is approximately \$3,695 and includes the entry fee, flights, hotel, and meal allowances. Coach Cassidy spoke briefly on behalf of competing athlete Antoine Jackman, highlighting his numerous accomplishments throughout the season and is looking forward to competing at the upcoming nationals with approval.

MOTION: by Mr. Hogan, seconded by Mr. Gitschier to approve the out of state travel request for one (1) wrestler and two (2) coaches to attend the 2025 NHSCA HS Wrestling Nationals in Virginia Beach, VA from March 28-30, 2025.

ROLL CALL VOTE: 8 Yes

Assistant Superintendent/Principal Barton spoke on the final out of state travel request which is an opportunity for five (5) administrators to attend a conference in California. Mr. Barton began by detailing, that in working collectively, the leadership team, school committee, and school staff over the last several years, there have been numerous successes. Mr. Barton reviewed these successes and then noted that he was approached by the Director of Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment Mr. Haas approximately two years ago to participate in the BARR Conference. Mr. Haas had significant experience with this program with stands for Building Assets and Reducing Risks. A decision was made, at that time, to not pursue this and pursued PBL (Project-Based Learning) Works where a large investment in terms of time and money was placed and has since resulted in tremendous success. In building on those successes and having the ability to dive deeper into terms of building teams within students, building teams within staff, increasing family engagement, etc., Mr. Barton felt that this was the time to pursue this conference, adding that the conference takes place during April school vacation and is not during student contact hours. The total cost is approximately \$18,830 and includes registration, flights, hotel, transportation and meal allowance. Assistant Superintendent/Principal Barton asked if there were any questions he could answer. With none, he asked to move for approval.

MOTION: by Mr. Gitschier, seconded by Mr. Hogan to approve the out of state travel request for five (5) administrators to attend the 2025 BARR National Conference in California from April 22-25, 2025.

ROLL CALL VOTE: 8 Yes

Superintendent Davis informed the committee that for the last two items on the agenda, Assistant Superintendent/Principal Michael Barton, along with our Director of School Counseling – Tracy Encarnacao and our Director of Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment – Greg Haas to review the revised language in the Student Handbook pertaining to the recent changes to the Title IX Sex-Based Harassment Policy, as well as the revised language in the Student Handbook pertaining to the Competency Determination Requirements. Director of School Counseling Ms. Encarnacao began with the language changes relating to Title IX Sex-Based Harassment. She informed the committee that, per the new federal statutes, the 2024 Title IX updates were revised as there was a motion from a federal judge which reverted the language back to the 2020 Title IX standards and policy. Therefore, our legal counsel have suggested that we update that accordingly, which occurs in two places which is the overall policy, as well as the Student Handbook. After reviewing the proposed changes, Ms. Davis asked if there were any questions before moving for a request for approval.

MOTION: by Mr. Bahou, seconded by Mr. Richardson to approve the Title IX-Sexual Harassment Policy as presented.

ROLL CALL VOTE: 8 Yes

Mr. Haas, Director of Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment spoke regarding the changes that resulted from the approval of ballot item #2 back in November that effectively removed MCAS as the mechanism for a student to earn what the Department of Elementary & Secondary Education (DESE) call 'competency determination', which is the other half of what is required to get a diploma. This half is the local requirements which are the courses that Greater Lowell says students need to take and pass and then the other piece which is competency determination. Mr. Haas noted that for the class of 2025, DESE has put out loose guidance, as the successor policy is out for public comment currently. Mr. Haas anticipates that he will be returning to the May meeting to speak about the permanent changes. Therefore, for the class of 2025, is proposing to modify DESE's interim standards. Mr. Haas clarified the proposed languages in detail, including revisions, addition and/or removal to language pertaining to MCAS appeals, promotion requirements, graduation requirements, local graduation requirements, course requirements, MCAS Retest, and MCAS/Scholarship Opportunities.

Committeeman Morin inquired about students who did not receive a diploma due to not passing the MCAS requirements having the ability to now receive one. Mr. Haas responded that students from 2003 through 2024 who had not earned a diploma due to not passing MCAS were, in the interim window, now eligible. He added that Ms. Encarnacao and himself had gone back through all of these students from 2023 on and had learned there were 99 students now eligible for a diploma and have reached out to these former students.

Committeeman Bahou spoke about current students and the MCAS exam. Mr. Haas confirmed that the MCAS exam will still be administered for 10th grade students in English and Math and 9th grade students in Biology, but will not be a requirement for a diploma. Mr. Haas noted that it is still a requirement that the students take this exam and still counts toward the school's accountability rating.

MOTION: by Mr. Bahou, seconded by Mr. Morin to approve the revised 2024-2025 Student Handbook.

ROLL CALL VOTE: 8 Yes

REPORT OF BUSINESS MANAGER

Mr. Knight spoke briefly to the committee, noting the Public Hearing on the proposed FY26 budget that occurred prior to the start of the School Committee meeting. With no further questions pending, he asked for approval of the proposed FY26 budget as presented at the Public Hearing.

MOTION: by Mr. Gitschier, seconded by Mr. Richardson to approve the FY26 budget of \$58,695,802.

ROLL CALL VOTE: 8 Yes

OLD BUSINESS

Outstanding Items from Previous Meetings

1. Superintendent's Wall (O'Hare)
2. Building Security (Sheehan)

NEW BUSINESS

Chairman Sheehan stated that it was time for the annual re-organization of the Board to be effective April 1, 2025.

MOTION: by Mr. Sheehan, seconded by Mr. Hogan to nominate Mr. Morin for Chairman.

Chairman Sheehan asked if there were any other nominations. Hearing none, Mr. Sheehan stated that nominations were closed.

BALLOT VOTE: Number of votes cast was 8. Mr. Morin received 8.

MOTION: by Mr. Gitschier, seconded by Mr. Morin to nominate Mr. LeMay for Vice Chairman.

Chairman Sheehan asked if there were any other nominations. Hearing none, Mr. Sheehan stated that nominations were closed.

BALLOT VOTE: Number of votes cast was 8. Mr. LeMay received 8.

MOTION: by Mr. Morin, seconded by Mr. Sheehan to nominate Mr. Richardson for Secretary.

Chairman Sheehan asked if there were any other nominations. Hearing none, Mr. Sheehan stated that nominations were closed.

BALLOT VOTE: Number of votes cast was 8. Mr. Richardson received 8.

COMMITTEEPERSON MOTION

There were no committeeperson motions.

REPORT OF SUB-COMMITTEES

MOTION: by Mr. Morin, seconded by Mr. Gitschier to approve the minutes of the February 13, 2025 Finance Sub-Committee meeting.

ROLL CALL VOTE: 8 Yes

ADJOURN

MOTION: by Mr. Morin, seconded by Mr. Gitschier to adjourn the meeting at 7:02 p.m.

ROLL CALL VOTE: 8 Yes

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Colette Edmonds". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Colette" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Edmonds".

Colette Edmonds
Recording Secretary

Meeting Documents:

Meeting Notice

Agenda

Minutes for Approval: February 13, 2025, February 13, 2025 (Finance Sub-Committee)

Copy of 2025 Cooperative Education Report

Copy of the Vehicle Donation Memo

Out-of-State Travel Information

Copy of the revised Title IX-Sex-Based Harassment Policy

Copy of the revised 2024-2025 Student Handbook