

The Special Meeting of the New London Board of Education was held on February 13, 2025 in the New London Public Schools' Welcome Center and via Zoom Webinars.

1. Call to Order

President Elaine Maynard-Adams called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.

Present for the Board of Education: President – Elaine Maynard-Adams
Vice-President – Bianca Alexis-Sylvain
Secretary – Nathan Caron

Board Members Present: Karen Bergin
Alisha Blake
Danni Cruz
Susan Hambey

Present for the Administration: Superintendent, Dr. Cynthia Ritchie

Prior to the start of the discussion of the budget, Ms. Maynard-Adams shared Public Speaking is not an item on the agenda, but that she would be relaxing general rules of meeting order to allow for the Mayor, members of City Council, and members of the Board of Finance to both make comments and ask questions about the budget as it is presented.

2. Continued Discussion of the Proposed FY2025-2026 Budget

- Dr. Cynthia Ritchie – Superintendent of Schools
- Mr. Rob Funk – Chief Financial Officer
- Ms. Melissa Flores-Seijo – Director of Business and Finance
- Dr. Jennifer Hills-Papetti – Assistant Superintendent
- Ms. Carrie Rivera – Executive Director of Student and Family Supports
- Mr. Miguel Gautier, Jr. – Executive Director of District Operations
- Ms. Kristea Francolino – Manager of Executive Support Services

Each page continued to be reviewed, beginning on p.123 through the end of the budget book. This included the overall financials and staffing information, and each individual school profile.

Mr. Funk shared that there were some adjustments made to some of the numbers from the first night of presentations, resulting in an additional decrease, and that these would be reflected in an updated version of the budget book, reflecting a 14.8% proposed increase in the General Fund for a same services budget.

Following the review of the remainder of the budget book, the following comments were shared.

Dr. Ritchie thanked those who have worked on the budget, and to those who have participated in the Joint Budget Task Force meetings. She shared that all were aware that this budget would be coming for the last few years. The District is fearful of taking programs apart, because they need to remain for students and families. The District has shaved positions down through recent budget cycles in the hopes of preparing for this. She further shared that the budget is at this point because the cost of inflation continues to go up, and grants were used over the recent years to pay for those increases. Now, inflation remains up and the grants have reduced. She has pushed the team to be creative, and if we can't fix an old system, how can things be done differently. The system of education is over 200 years old and does not work for every student or family. Dr. Ritchie continued that as she has shared with her team, she has four suggested strategies to address this budget: 1) consolidate where possible, 2) promote shared services, 3) innovate, and 4) create possible new funding streams. She has been thinking big and creatively about what is possible. Part of problem solving is putting ideas on the table. She believes that through collaboration with the City, there can be some solutions that can help many people.

Consolidation where possible and promoting shared services go hand-in-hand. She shared that she and the team would like to offer to move out of Central Office to free up space and be housed in school buildings throughout the district. Through this, additional services and support can be located directly at the schools. The vision is to be united in excellence, and Central Office staff understand that. She would allow the building to close if that is what the City prefers, shutting down utilities and the need for supplies. It would then be possible for the City to look for a way to rent out or utilize as additional space. She also suggested a unique idea of creating affordable housing for paraeducators. It was noted that the approximate estimation of savings by moving staff out of Central Office would be approximately \$100-125,000 per year.

Dr. Ritchie added that another idea is to partner more closely with the New London Adult Education program and facility. They have NAEYC certified for infants and toddlers, and are doing other education programming as well. As there is an analyzation of what can be done together, that might be another area of savings that can be shared. Some examples include utilizing some of the space for classes for high school students, both during the day and for evening classes. She shared that the B.P. Mission building was bought in partnership with the City during COVID. While the program is well-loved, the building is outgrown. Another idea is considering moving this program to another space to expand it; while the program is magnetized, additional students cannot be added currently because of the footprint. She shared that she has begun conversations with Adult Education Director, Ms. Denise Spellman, about whether this might be a possibility and to merge the programs. If it is possible to do so, then the B.P. building might be able to be repurposed and a revenue generator for the City. She shared this idea to try to protect staff and programs but do more for our families with less money.

Ms. Maynard-Adams responded to this idea sharing that Adult Educations survives primarily on its own grant which is specific. She asked if it would be possible to put a non Adult Education program in that space without risking the grant. Dr. Ritchie shared that she recently walked the building with other leaders and that there are lulls in the time, and a lot of space, but it is aligned to a purpose in their grant. Ms. Maynard-Adams shared that she would be cautious of ensuring that we are aware of the guidelines to not risk the grant. Dr. Ritchie agreed, and shared that if this suggestion were to be utilized, there would be review of the grant and an identification of spaces that could be used. It is the District's due diligence to have these conversations and see what is possible.

Dr. Ritchie additionally shared the idea of building a Special Education program which could potentially bring some students back from outplacements, as appropriate. To do this would require a need to build and recruit staff.

Regarding innovation, Dr. Ritchie explained that for the past few years, the District has been home to an optional model known as year-round schooling/session-based schooling. She explained that this means that students still receive 180 days of schooling, but it is laid out differently with 6 weeks of schooling and two week breaks. This optional program can be found in grades K-5 at Winthrop and Nathan Hale. She shared that the families who have opted into this program have had great things to say so far. Additionally, many staff members have opted to become substitutes during the two week breaks for their colleagues. Dr. Ritchie stated that there will be a survey to staff to see if there are any others interested in working in this model, and if so, additional sections may be added. Moving forward, there will no longer be two teachers in the classroom. It was also added that there are more students achieving at grade level by utilizing this optional model. Dr. Ritchie noted that this can also be a potential budget saver, as it can help with substitute costs, as well as summer school costs. Informational sessions will be held as well.

Regarding the creation of new revenue streams, Dr. Ritchie explained that the District had given back Harbor to the City approximately 2 years ago. If that sells, as discussed at the time with the Mayor and City representatives, those funds can come back to support the school budget. If something can be done with the Central Office space once vacated by staff, then additional funds may be able to be garnered there. There have also been discussions of consolidating locations for summer programming, as the cost for air conditioning is so high. There was a suggestion from City Councilor John Satti about consolidation of the Finance and Human Resource offices between the City and Board of Education. He shared that this was a discussion that has been had previously.

Ms. Maynard-Adams allowed for closing comments from those in attendance, and City Councilor Reona Dyess stated that she appreciated Dr. Ritchie putting forward the information about how the City and Board could collaborate to maximize dollars. She was glad that this component was included in the presentation. She added that this was a lot of information to digest over the past few days, but that the most important part is that New London has great schools, teachers, and staff. As a Councilor, she understands that there is a need to ensure that residents are not being overtaxed, so she likes the fact of looking at ways to still provide quality services while working together. She also wanted to make an emphasis

on the number of non-profit services in the community, and to ensure that some of the things that the District is doing goes back to them, as there is a need in the community for the families as well.

Ms. Maynard-Adams thanked the Mayor, City Staff, City Councilors, Board of Finance Members, and public for coming forward for these important meetings. She also thanked the Superintendent and staff for being present, building the budget, educating all, and for all that is done for the students and families.

3. Adjournment

Motion by Mr. Cruz, seconded by Ms. Bergin, to adjourn the meeting.

Motion carried, 7-0

The meeting was adjourned at 8:04 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Nathan Caron
Secretary