

The Special Meeting of the New London Board of Education was held on February 19, 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: Alisha Blake
Karen Bergin
Danni Cruz (*attended virtually, joined at 6:07 p.m.*)
Susan Hambey

Present for the Administration: Superintendent, Dr. Cynthia Ritchie

Due to a Board member attending virtually, all votes were taken by roll call.

2. Public Hearing on the FY 2025-2026 Budget

Ms. Maynard-Adams shared that during the previous special meetings on the budget she had waived the standard rules of procedure to allow questions from elected and appointed officials. This evening, the Board will be reverting back to their standard rules of procedure, and anyone wishing to speak should sign up to do so. Once the list has been completed, she will then ask again if there is any interest in speaking. She shared that if there are any questions, to please be sure your contact information has been shared so that answers can be provided.

Ms. Francolino, Manager of Executive Support Services, read two written submissions aloud for public comment from Kaitlyn Brown and Katherine Trejo-Thorpe. These submissions can be found at the end of these minutes in their entirety.

Jadelise Garrett, New London – Ms. Garrett came forward and stated that she was here to advocate for funding which prioritizes students. She shared that last year she was one of the many who came forward to advocate for and help receive an additional \$1.5 million in education funding to ensure that student supports remain intact. All need to recognize the priorities in the schools. She shared that at the middle school and high school campus it seems that there is an increase of administration while a reduction of other staff. She wondered if we are ensuring that students are receiving the direct supports that they need. Support staff are not luxuries, but are necessities. They are the backbone of a school community. If these positions are cut, there is a risk of cutting from students an opportunity for success when they need it the most. There can be discussions of efficiencies, but not at the cost of the well-being of

students. Education is an investment, and she asks that the Board invests in what matters the most, the students.

Jacob Epps, New London – Mr. Epps shared the had questions, rather than comments regarding the budget. He asked:

- If the district is budgeting a certain amount for a program, and then grant funding is later received, what happens to the funds from the general fund that were previously allocated?
- Why are there programs that are not funded by grant money? Last year there were some which were heavily funded by grants that are now completely blank. It seems concerning that there is not a dollar found in terms of grant money to be allocated.
- Has any financial planning been done should there be a cease of federally derived funds and grants?

Bev Steinman, New London – Ms. Steinman shared that she is a proud Whaler from the Class of 1962, and that her first teaching position was at the original Winthrop School. She has taught at the elementary, middle, high, and college levels and was a reading and language arts consultant who is sad to be here this evening. She stated that she believes the New London magnet school budget is not responsible to the cash strapped taxpayers and that the schools need to be put under a financial microscope. Fiscal responsibility and academic achievement are long overdue in NLPS. She thinks it is time for our leaders to stop putting away millions at an inefficient school system with a bottom of the barrel literacy rate. She shared that students obtain a 23% at reading proficiency and 12% math proficiency score at the district level, and high school students had a 12% reading and 5% math proficiency. For starters, she said that things can be done to improve achievement and cut costs, and that the Superintendent and Board President need to pledge allegiance to accountability and scrutinize every dollar to ensure that school spending is result oriented. She believes schools need to operate more efficiently, and potentially cost sharing form of management with other towns. She believes there should be less administration, supervisors and managers, allowing for more power and resources to individual schools which need boot camp reading and math. She believes a forensic state audit is needed to ensure it is money spent wisely with an unbiased description of how well the district is performing. She added that the experts need to stop committing fiscal suicide and academic bankruptcy with tax dollars, and that the business of education needs to change so that the tax base will increase by attracting more people who want to live in New London.

Sarah Turner, New London – Ms. Turner shared that she wanted to begin her comments by saying she appreciates there will now be responses to questions given because she has not received any resolve of the complaints she has made before. She doesn't know how long it will take for the questions to be answered, but she hopes there will be a time limit. She also shared that since the budget updates were made online shortly before the meeting, she did not have the ability to print it out and that does not help to be able to ask questions. She shared that she looked at the money allocated for the price per student across all school systems, and it seems that B.P. receives an amount of \$39,715.24 per student. She understands that they received a grant of \$2 million last year for their funding of 66 students, but when it is looked at compared to the other schools in district, it does not seem like a clear allocation of funds

and whether it is done by each student or the schools. Now that the district no longer has the grant, she wondered where the money would be coming from. She expressed that she has a concern with the lack of transparency when it comes to the year round program. She does not know what the issue is, but believes that at the high school it is not good. She shared that she has sat in events where people from other districts have communicated their displeasure. She stated that people want to stay and work for New London but thinks there is a disconnect between the top and where the money is going. She said that if you have a STEM person sitting over three pathways and their specialty is not arts, the arts are not getting what they need, and there should be an allocation of resources and specialty teachers to the right areas. She shared she was at the school for several hours today, and hopes that with this budget the cause for the disconnect can be determined. She stated that she heard from a Board member from another town that the problem is academics and that kids go to college and don't have what they need to perform. She said she has been focused on the arts and music, but is fearful that her child does not have what she needs. She shared that her child is in an honors class and is learning the same things as non-honors students. She has asked for curriculum and has not received it. If the numbers keep dropping for out of district students, and the basis is to attract students from out of town, then that is what the focus should be on. An education needs to be provided that makes people want to come, but not one where the students in the pathways are mixed. They need to be specialty and run by someone who is a specialist in that field. She hopes that next year there can be some differences there. She asked whose job it was to apply for grants and funding. She used the example of only 21C for Nathan Hale, but not for the other schools. She shared that if schools were able to decide and understand how much they are allocated and where they can put it for resources, maybe that would be better and not at the expense of the kids' education and their opportunities.

Victoria Mueller, New London – Ms. Mueller stated that she lives in New London and is a member of the Board of Finance. She shared that she has enjoyed the nights of the budget hearings, finding them to be very helpful and illuminating. She continued that we are in a tough spot in New London. The budget put forth is asking for an extra \$8 million that the City does not have, and based upon what she can see it looks like it is going to result in a substantial increase to taxpayers if every piece was funded. She shared that while she is new to the budget process, with this being only her third year on the Board of Finance, she thinks what she sees is that the school budget has become unwieldy over time. Now it is at a place where a lot of things are included that maybe don't belong anymore. This does not mean that things are not valid or important, but only because they cannot be afforded. She enjoyed listening to the Superintendent and staff about their programs and initiatives. She shared her children attend Nathan Hale and they have been there for about 4-5 years. As such, she has had the experience of being in the school system, and it does not seem like the \$50 million that is being spent on the schools is filtering down to the kids and teachers, where it needs to be. She expressed that she can understand why year-round schooling can be exciting, because a lack of learning loss is attractive to any student or educator, but if there are 11 educators working in that program, and there is a ration of 1:13, that is versus the 1:22 ratio present in the rest of the schools. Factoring in the cost of support staff and any admin costs, that program would be costing more per child than for the kids in the traditional program. The question would be is if it is affordable. She mentioned that in the International Education pathway, there is a program for barbershop for \$80,000 to teach 5-6 students. This is more of a

postsecondary educational pursuit rather than high school. There is a proposal for a Director of Innovation and Homebound at the cost of \$164,000 per year, which a part of this job is to get 18-22 year old students to come to school. She listened about the proposal to close down Central office and disperse throughout the schools and other buildings, and the Welcome Center that exists and is serving an important need, but it costs \$275,000 to staff the Welcome Center, and there is an increase of \$122,000 in rent for this space. She also noted that between nights 1 and 2 there was a \$200,000 discrepancy discovered in the Facilities section and wondered how there could have been such a large mistake and how many other numbers may not be accurate. She continued that it seems there is a need to go back to basics and looking at the buildings in house rather than worrying about the landscaping. She appreciated the increased transparency in this budget from last year, but thinks there is still more work to do to drill down to see where money is being spent. The consolidation of City Services seemed like it made sense, and thinks there should be serious energy put into the possibilities to save real money and create a better system of education for the kids.

3. Continued Discussion

Ms. Maynard-Adams shared that she had asked Mr. Funk to provide a summary of the reductions and amendments that were able to be made in the budget the previous week. Mr. Funk shared this outline with the Board. ***(This document was shared during the meeting and can be found at the end of these minutes in its entirety.)***

Ms. Maynard-Adams asked about the 21C grant at Nathan Hale. Dr. Jennifer Hills-Papetti, Assistant Superintendent, shared that the school year started with the loss of the 21C grant at the middle school and high school. Since then, the District has been awarded with funding for Nathan Hale. With that award, general funds originally allocated for Nathan Hale have been able to be shifted to expand more opportunities at Jennings, Winthrop, the middle school and high school.

4. Possible Amendments of the Proposed FY2025-2026 Budget

Motion by Ms. Maynard-Adams, seconded by Ms. Bergin, to eliminate one administrator position, to be determined by the Superintendent.

Motion carried, 7-0

Motion by Ms. Maynard-Adams, seconded by Ms. Hambey, to reduce two elementary level teachers, dependent upon enrollment to be determined by the Superintendent and her team.

Ms. Maynard-Adams asked for clarification of the year-round program. Dr. Ritchie shared that the year-round teachers work under the same contract as other teachers. The implementation of the year-round schooling option began during COVID, when there were more funds and two teachers per classroom. She shared that having two teachers in the classroom is not a model that can be afforded moving forward. There is no additional cost to

the program, just the choice of a different model, and there could be savings on the back end because there is not a cost for summer school staff with this optional track.

Motion carried, 5-2
Voting no: Ms. Blake
Mr. Cruz

Ms. Blake stated that she is the only Board member which has children in the school system. When she ran for office and was elected, she ran stating that she would never vote yes to remove a body from one of the buildings, and that is why she chose to vote no.

Motion by Ms. Maynard-Adams, seconded by Ms. Bergin, to eliminate one attendance motivator position.

It was shared that this was an anticipated vacancy, as the staff member currently holding the position has given their resignation.

Motion carried, 6-1
Voting no:

Motion by Ms. Maynard-Adams, to eliminate an additional vacant teaching position.

Motion failed, no second.

Motion by Ms. Blake, seconded by Ms. Bergin, to eliminate a nursing position at a non-public school.

Mr. Caron stated that he understands that attempts for communication have been made to a potential specific school, and asked if there had been any return communication. Dr. Ritchie shared that she has not heard anything. Mr. Caron asked if we were legally obligated to provide this. Ms. Maynard-Adams shared that she had reached out to legal counsel at CAFE, and has specifically asked how other cities and towns in Connecticut handle this situation, especially those towns who are host to well-endowed private schools. It was evenly split between those who do not provide because they were not asked to, and for those who do, the funding source was split evenly between Board and City funds. There is an ambiguity in the State Statute regarding whose responsibility it is. She believes that based on her conversation with legal counsel, there are some things that can be done.

Motion carried, 7-0

Mr. Funk noted that these reductions totaled \$548,162.00, which brings the ask to a 13.7% overall increase to the budget.

Mr. Caron asked what the upcoming process is. It was clarified that the Board's vote on the proposed budget would be held on March 3. Ms. Maynard-Adams shared that even between now and then there are many moving parts. Dr. Ritchie shared that there is a vote in the

legislature on Monday evening, which may provide additional funding for Special Education which is greatly needed. Additionally, a meeting has been scheduled between Board President Maynard-Adams, the Superintendent, Representative Nolan and Senator Marx with Early Childhood Education Commissioner Beth Bye. This meeting will hopefully end with additional financial support for the preschool program at B.P. Dr. Ritchie also shared that she is in discussions with the State Magnet Office, as there has not been an increase in magnet funding allocations per student since 2012. Along with this, she is also going to have the conversation for the ability to fully magnetize the International Education pathway through grade 12.

Mr. Funk noted that while the Governor's budget has been issued, it is not necessarily what will pass. Ms. Maynard-Adams mentioned that the School and State Finance Project has been actively working with the State Legislature to hopefully create a LOSIP program which will assist Boards of Education. There was also an additional discussion that factored into the current budget request is the use of funds in the non-lapsing fund. There is a hope that additional funds may be added once the FY24 audit has been completed.

5. Adjournment

Motion by Ms. Blake, seconded by Ms. Hambey, to adjourn the meeting.

Motion carried, 7-0

The meeting was adjourned at 7:12 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Nathan Caron
Secretary

**Additional Cuts made 1-13-25 morning after
1st budget presentation**

	Wages	Benefits
Prog 69	(60,000)	(130)
Prog 91	(232,960)	(17,815)
Prog 26	(181,530)	(10,562)

Additional Cuts made 1-13-25 morning**Total after 1st budget presentation**

(60,130)	Reduce Homebound tutor hours from 4,500 hours to 3,000 hours
(250,775)	Reduce Sub Custodians from 7x2080 to 3x2080
(192,092)	Reduce After School Hourly

(502,997)

55,790,399 Gen Fund Previous to 2nd set of cuts

(502,997) Additional Cuts

55,287,402 Adjusted Gen Fund

48,144,795 FY25 Gen Fund

7,142,607 Increase in General Fund YOY

14.84% Increase %