

MINUTES

Hoosac Valley Regional School Committee
School Committee Meeting - Budget Hearing
Monday, March 10, 2025 - 6:30 p.m.
Hoosac Valley High School - Resource Room
125 Savoy Road, Cheshire, MA

PRESENT: Adam Emerson, Erin Milne, John Duval, Andy Przystanski, Robert Tetlow, Fred Lora

ABSENT:

OTHERS: Superintendent Aaron Dean, Student Representatives - Corey Charron & Anna Thurston

I. Call to Order

Chairman Adam Emerson called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

II. Approval of Minutes - February 10, 2025

MOTION: On Motion of Andy Przystanski and second by Robert Tetlow:

VOTED: to approve the February 10, 2025 School Committee minutes. The vote was unanimous.

III. Report of Superintendent -

A. Budget Hearing - Chairman Adam Emerson reported to the Committee that the budget in front of them tonight, A & E has reviewed twice, made changes, a long process - Aaron and team has done a lot of work to put this together. A lot of moving pieces.

Aaron: difficult year in how to make the numbers work. Looking at the state of the Towns, we know that they can't afford a 5, 6, 7, or 8 percent increase. Not realistic. Took time to thoughtfully go through the budget, numbers that we can work with and that the towns can work with. This can't be our long term solution. It's a situation where we will run out of reserves and be in a very difficult situation in the coming years. Pointed out steps forward with our accountability data. Focused on math, students with disabilities in mathematics - have a lot of investment in science programming. Still working on ELA - Everyone in the state struggled with ELA testing. Performed very strongly last year with our testing. We have to continue to invest in the right areas. Work we need to continue: enhancing and streamlining systems for proactive students behavioral support, ensuring consistent, inclusive and effective interventions across all schools. Refining and aligning curriculum implementation processes with MTSS frameworks, ensuring timely, data driven interventions and consistent instructional support; Strengthening systems for ongoing staff development, integrating actionable feedback and robust evaluation methods to foster continuous professional growth; Deepening the integration of applied learning pathways across grade levels, ensuring comprehensive implementation of universal pre-k and fostering readiness for post-secondary success.

FY 2026 - significant challenges: 1 million increase in out of district tuition; 16% increase in insurance costs; Limited resources to fill the gap between revenues and costs. Strategic Response: Consolidations and strategic partnerships; Use of revolving funds (short term solution); Focus on maintaining critical student programming. We made so many gains in areas in so many years, don't want to throw it out. Pathway programming, math curriculum, ELA curriculum, students deserve it.

FY26 Operating Reductions: **Special Ed. Teacher, **Elementary Classroom Teacher; **Middle School Exploratory Teacher, **Middle School Rise Teacher, **High School ACE Teacher, **4 paraprofessionals, **Secondary level SAC, High School Reset Coordinator, Secondary level BCBA - Elementary and Middle School Deans moved to rural aid. (** are long term sub or through attrition). Aaron discussed these cuts with the committee. Walker Therapeutic and Educational Programs and Behavioral health integrated resources for Children (BIRCh) Center to assist in evaluating and establishing behavioral support systems (State Grant). The state is partnering with us and giving us these two resources. Over the years, the state has been looking to give us grants and opportunities.

Teacher Shortage: Impact and Required Adjustments - Special Education Staffing Issues - High demand for educators with severe needs licensure and experience; private institutions offer higher salaries; Adjusted staffing with two coordinators replacing unfilled teaching positions; Coordinators focus on IEP development, enabling teachers to prioritize service delivery

New Partnership for Severe needs programming (secondary level) - Collaboration with New England Center for Children; \$215,000 investment from choice funds; Aim to reduce outplacement by developing in house programming; Potential to produce revenue by accepting tuition students. Monica Zanin stated that we have not had teachers that have been qualified for these positions. Need to look elsewhere. Looking at the expertise of the BCBA and severe special education teacher. We have 8 students now outplaced at a really expensive cost. Our students here deserve better, this is a great way to meet the needs of our students.

Curriculum and Instructional Priorities: Key Investments: Completion of updated Math Curriculum for SY25-26; Expansion of PLTW, Open Sci Ed, Investigating History and Democratic Knowledge Projects with grant funding; Retention of essential instructional leadership roles (Curriculum Director, APs of Teaching and Learning). We are in the process of updating our math curriculum for next year. Kristen Palatt stated that it is important to follow systems both the district vision and teacher implementation when it comes to curriculum. Starting last spring formed a math curriculum council with teachers at every level pre-k - 8, students, families and followed the DESE implementation process. Every math teacher piloted one or both math curriculum. We polled every math teacher in the district and they unanimously approved one of the curriculum. In April, presenting a recommendation to the committee, voted unanimously by the teachers and fully supported by the students.

Combatting narratives: Administration heavy - Statutory Required Roles: Superintendent, Business Manager, and Director of Student Services. Necessary Positions: Teacher Level Pay despite extended work year -

Director of Technology: shifted from a shared position due to post COVID demands; Three Deans of Students: Required for managing and documenting discipline under new discipline law (37H ¼) updates; Three Assistant Principals of Teaching and Learning: Transitioned from coaching roles to support curriculum, data analysis, and instructional leadership. District Level Additions Post COVID: Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Professional Development - oversight of curriculum initiatives, staff mentorship and grant acquisition; facilitate partnerships with the state POG and the One8 foundation - has written over \$1,577,300 in grants supporting various educational initiatives. We don't function as a high quality district without these positions. Associate Director of Student Services: Oversees special education supports, IEP processes, Pre-K coordination, Title I programs, literacy and SEL initiatives, Math Recovery, kindergarten transitions, teacher diversification, private school services, and continuous program improvement per DESE standard. Facilitate partnerships with state partners, the EEC and the Hill for Literacy - secured over 5.3 million in grants supporting student services and program enhancements. Aaron discussed her work and accomplishments.

Recommendations and budget review: Recommend Alternative Revenue Uses: Apply \$275,000 from Circuit Breaker funds to OOD tuition; Apply \$500,000 from school choice to OOD tuition; Apply \$215,000 from school choice for severe needs programming; Math Intervention to Title 1;

Recommended partnerships: Walker Education; Behavioral health Integrated Resources for Children Center; Partnership for Advancement of School Service Providers; New England Center for Children; One8 Foundation (PLTW and Applied Learning Curricula)

Erika discussed the 10 year enrollment history for the Towns of Adams and Cheshire.

Appendix A: Erika discussed Chapter 70, Medicaid, Appropriations of E & D, Transportations Assessments to Towns, Capital Assessments to the Towns is the building project, using E & D to offset some major repairs.

Appendix G: Total Town Assessments within levy limit Adams increase of 2.325% and Cheshire increase of 3.623%

Appendix C: Aaron discussed where money is going, Special Education Instruction, Health Insurance, Maintenance of Buildings, School Building Operations, Charter School Sending Tuition, Pupil Transportation, Retirement Contributions, Technology.

Aaron discussed the FY26 Preliminary Budget: Page 1 - Revenue and Expenditure Summary; Page 2 Regular Instruction, Special Education, Instructional Support, Maintenance; Page 3 - Operational Services, Foundation Budget Expenditures, Capital Expenditure Budget, Regular Instructions; Page 4 - Substitutes, Secretarial, Curriculum Planning, General Supplies; Page 5 - Elementary & Middle School Supports and teaching salaries; Page 6 - Pathways, ELA, Foreign Language, Woodshop, Mathematics; Page 7 - Music, Physical Education, Science, Social Studies, Specialists/tutoring; Page 8 - Special Education, Preschool; Page 9 - Tuition for Out of

District Placements; School Committee, District Administration; Page 10 - Staff Development, School Counselors, Health Services; Page 11 - Technology, Athletics, Student Activities, Instructional Leadership Team; Page 12 - Custodial Services, Heat & Utilities; Page 13 - Maintenance of Buildings, General Administration; Fringe Benefits; Page 14 - Total Expenditure Budget: 2.91% - See attached preliminary budget.

Adam Emerson stated that this is a lot of information, review this proposed budget, if you have any questions, please reach out. The A & E committee went through this budget many times, line by line. Erika will have any back up for any further information. Any questions from the committee? Fred Lora: Do we have an organizational chart that backs up the table? Aaron will share.

IV. Public Comment or Question - Jen Solak - parent - member of SEPAC - it would be beneficial to talk about Special Education to the public and the importance of it especially during budget time, - having parents talk, encouraging the personal stories, talk about the budget being so big around special education, getting more connections beyond the numbers, reminding them what these students are entitled to.

MOTION: On Motion of Erin Milne and second by Andy Pryzstanki:

VOTED: To adjourn the meeting at 7:55 p.m. The vote was unanimous.

Respectfully Submitted,

Aaron Dean, Superintendent

Lisa Bresett, Recording Secretary