Summary of September, 2025
RSD17 Board of Education Meeting

COUGAR PRIDE

HKHS Principal Donna Hayward presented the Class of 2025 Graduate Report to the Board. She provided highlights of the graduating students' statistics. Some noted areas of significance were:

- A steady percentage of students (90%) choosing to continue their formal education
- A roughly 50/50 split between students continuing their education in Connecticut and those leaving their home state
- The very high success rate in Advanced Placement courses
- The close distribution among the most popular majors – STEM-related fields (22%), Health Sciences (21%), Humanities (20%), and Business (19%)
- The increase in students pursuing a career in education

Principal Hayward was recognized by the Board for her recent election to the National Association of Secondary School Principals' board of directors, and she was presented with a Certificate of Excellence.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

FY25 Audit Governance Planning Communication

Superintendent Smith reported that he intends to have the auditing company, CliftonLarsenAllen LLP , come to a future meeting for the purpose of providing a report, communicating highlights, and addressing concerns regarding the results of the audit, once concluded.

Budget Planning FY27

Superintendent Smith presented the preliminary Budget Planning 2026-2027 and stated that it will be released to the public on September 17th through the Regional School District 17 website. The budget process will be moving forward by October 1st and in place for the new Superintendent's arrival in January 2026.

Review of Fire Tower Engineered Timber Report

Superintendent Smith reported on the status of the White Barn as provided by the consultant Fire Tower Engineered Timber, Inc. The report provided the Board with an initial assessment and information on next steps. The decision by the Board to demolish the barn or to repair the structure will be made in the future. The Board has sent the topic to the Facilities subcommittee to research the project and bring back recommendations to the full board.

High School Project Referendum Update

Board Chair Sack provided a summary and timeline of the High School project process to date. Board Chair Sack read the following statement into the minutes regarding the High School Project and October 7th referendum:

Statement by the RSD17 Board of Education September 16, 2025

The RSD17 Board of Education extends its sincere appreciation to the members of the school community, as well as the residents of Haddam and Killingworth, for their ongoing support of the educational programs serving our students. Addressing the needs of the aging high school facility has been a top priority for the Board. Following several years of studies and recommendations, the Board was presented with a proposal involving new construction while retaining the existing pool, field house, and auditorium. This project was subsequently approved by the Board to proceed to a referendum scheduled for October 7.

Earlier this month, the Board identified certain technical issues related to the project's bonding and referendum procedures. Given the proximity of upcoming elections and a deadline from the State to secure funding for the application that was submitted on June 30, the referendum timeline is not feasible at this time.

While the Board and the community are aligned on the need for substantial and urgent improvement of the Haddam-Killingworth High School, it seems that community sentiment for the current proposed project presents more questions than answers about why, what, how, and at what cost to complete it. Therefore, the Board has, by not taking action to remedy the earlier mentioned technical issues, put the October 7th referendum "on hold."

Because of the scope and urgency of the needs of the High School, the Board will reengage with a plan to move forward. While the current proposal emphasized new construction as the solution to the high school's needs, this pause affords the Board the opportunity to consider additional, alternative approaches.

Although the referendum is on hold, improvement to the Haddam-Killingworth High School remains an urgent and significant priority. Work will continue diligently, with careful consideration of the community's needs and preferences, recognizing that this project represents a substantial investment for the towns of Haddam and Killingworth.

We will communicate in the very near future with next steps and how the community can stay apprised of the Board's effort and actions.

The Board voted unanimously for Superintendent Smith to post notice of this action on the district website.

TECHNOLOGY UPDATES

On October 4th, the RSD17 Google account was compromised by an outside source and was temporarily shut down. Every safety and privacy precaution was taken and all student chromebooks were collected and scrubbed of any potentially inappropriate content. The system has been fully restored as of October 14th.

SUPERINTENDENT SEARCH

The Board of Education is in the process of working with Cooperative Educational Services (CES) to hire the next Superintendent of Schools. As part of the process, CES previously conducted electronic surveys and focus groups to gain a sense of the school community's opinion of the strengths and weaknesses of the school district, as well as key performance criteria for a successful Superintendent in RSD17. As a result, CES has released a document for the community to review.

ON OUR WEBSITE

RSD17 Board of Education information and past updates may be found at: https://www.rsd17.org/district/board-of-education.

For more information on the superintendent search, the Stakeholder Feedback Report and Leader Profile is now completed and available on the district website under the District tab or by clicking here.