

S.C. MINUTES

Hoosac Valley Regional School Committee
School Committee Meeting
Monday, December 8, 2025 - 6:30 p.m.
Hoosac Valley High School, Resource Center, 125 Savoy Road, Cheshire, MA

PRESENT: Erin Milne, John Duval, Robert Tetlow, Fred Lora, Tracey Tierney, Jen Solak, Adam Emerson

ABSENT:

OTHERS: Aaron Dean

104398 **Call to Order**

Chairman Erin Milne called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

104399 **Public Comment or Questions**

Erin requested a change of order to the agenda to present the Superintendents Award first. There were no objections.

104400 **Approval of Minutes - November 17, 2025**

MOTION: On Motion of Tracey and second by Fred Lora, Adam Emerson Abstained
VOTED: to approve the November 17, 2025 School Committee minutes. The vote was 6 - 0 - 1

104401 **Report of Business Manager**

104402 **Report of Sub Committees**

- A. Maintenance** - A maintenance update was provided noting preparations for the winter season are complete, with snow removal and salting contracted through a cost-effective partnership between outside contractors and in-house staff. Discussion addressed roof replacement planning and MSBA funding, clarifying that the application window does not open until next year and that no roof project will be presented in the upcoming budget cycle; focus will be on the non-renovated portion of the current building roof and the middle section of the elementary school. The durability of past roof work was noted, with prior high-quality construction exceeding expected lifespan. An update was given on basketball hoop replacement, with the architect and installer finalizing specifications that reinforce existing beams as the most cost-effective solution. It was reported that building systems, including boilers and heating systems in both buildings, are functioning well, inspections are current, and ongoing maintenance work has kept facilities in good condition.
- B. DEIB Advisory - Update on Activities and Annual Appointment of Members**
The Committee identified staff training needs and focus areas. Reviewed and approved member reappointments, including one new parent member. Noted one fewer staff member; plans to recruit replacement.

MOTION: On Motion of Jen Solak and second by John Duval
VOTED: to approve the list presented to reappoint of current members to the DEIB Advisory with the addition of Erin. The vote was unanimous.

104403 **Communications**

A. Presentation of M.A.S.S. Superintendent's Award

The Superintendent presented the Superintendent's Award to Anna Thurston following remarks by Principal Byrd recognizing Anna's exceptional academic achievement, leadership, and service to the school community. Staff comments highlighted her intelligence, resilience, professionalism, and positive attitude, as well as her active involvement in student leadership and service organizations. In presenting the award, the Superintendent commended Anna for her strong student voice, professionalism, and ability to bring both insight and positive energy to school initiatives, noting it was a pleasure to work with her, and congratulated Anna and her parents on this distinguished accomplishment.

B. Request for Approval for Grade 6 Nature's Classroom Trip

The board received a request to approve the annual Grade 6 Nature's Classroom trip to Charlton, a district tradition spanning approximately 35 years. The trip is scheduled for the first week of March for grades 5 and 6, which helps keep costs lower. The cost per student is \$313, paid by families, with financial assistance available through fundraising and an ACE grant. Payment plans are offered to support families, and no student has been excluded due to financial need. The trip is open to all sixth graders, with information packets and permission slips to be distributed following a parent informational meeting. For students who do not attend, alternative programming will be provided at school. Behavioral

expectations are clearly outlined with signed agreements from parents and additional rules enforced by Nature's Classroom.

MOTION:

On Motion of John Duval and second by Adam Emerson

VOTED: to approve Request for Grade 6 Nature's Classroom Trip. The vote was unanimous.

C. Principals to Report on Processes for Dealing with Chronic Absenteeism

Each building has teams to address chronic absenteeism, using various support methods, including family engagement and referrals to outside organizations.

After the pandemic, attendance issues rose, but improvements have been made with ongoing efforts to re-engage students.

Each school has a dedicated team (assistant principal, SAC, counselors, school psychologist, etc.) to address attendance, meeting regularly to review data.

Attendance data is tracked using a spreadsheet that flags changes (e.g., improved attendance turns green, worsening attendance turns red). It links to family resources and documents.

Clear communication with parents is emphasized to avoid misunderstandings, especially regarding court involvement.

Clear procedures are in place for reporting medical absences, with the importance of doctor's notes for documentation.

Teams develop action plans based on attendance data, with responsibilities assigned to specific staff members.

Personalized phone calls are being used to engage families and improve attendance.

Strategies to keep students engaged include offering incentives (like attendance recognition) and addressing barriers like anxiety or family issues.

There are various challenges, such as students missing school due to travel, medical reasons, or lack of transportation, which are being addressed with creative solutions like partnerships with local programs.

Efforts are being made to connect students to support systems and ensure they understand the importance of regular attendance for their academic success.

The goal is to create a supportive environment where students and families understand the importance of school attendance and feel supported.

104404

Report of Superintendent

A. Overview of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)

Superintendent presented an overview of the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), emphasizing layered academic, behavioral, and social-emotional supports to engage students and families.

Reset and RISE spaces support regulation and restorative practices; ACE supports high school academic re-engagement; Bridges and Cornerstone serve students with intensive and specialized needs. Some programs were combined due to staffing constraints.

Tier 1 Supports: Differentiated instruction, UDL practices, core curriculum, advisory/morning meeting structures, and common planning time.

Tier 2 Supports: Targeted academic and behavioral interventions, small-group instruction, and reset rooms.

Tier 3 Supports: Intensive services including special education, one-to-one paraprofessionals, counseling, related services, and specialized programs.

Elementary Model: Integrated MTSS with Walk to Read, diagnostics, behavior analysts, interventionists, and frequent data review through building-based teams. High student needs, staffing shortages, and recruitment difficulties continue to impact service delivery.

MTSS data and staffing information will support upcoming budget discussions.

B. Overview of FY2027 Budget Calendar

Beginning in January planning begins. Budget hearings are anticipated in the second week of March, with town discussions typically held in early April after budget adoption.

A chairs' meeting will be scheduled to align with town leadership and the School Committee chair on process and expectations.

Budget discussions with A&E will wait until firm House 1 numbers are available to avoid working from estimates.

Health insurance rates will be voted on January 28; increases are expected and similar to last year's rise.

Financial uncertainties at both the state and federal levels, including funding levels and policy changes.

Potential positives include continued Chapter 70 progress and possible benefits from SOA funding, though outcomes remain uncertain.

Overall, budget planning will proceed cautiously due to multiple unknown

104405

Chairman's Report - none

104406

Unfinished Business - none

104407

New Business

A. Approval of Memorandum of Agreement with ACTA Adjusting Salary of Speech Language Pathologists

The Board reviewed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Teachers Association to adjust the salary schedule for Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs).

The adjustment addresses underpayment compared to neighboring districts and ongoing staffing shortages.

The district currently has one SLP supporting multiple assistants and managing virtual services, with additional hours beyond a standard schedule.

The proposed salary structure eliminates extra hour tracking, provides a competitive salary, supports staff retention, and improves recruitment.

New hires would be placed on the M+24 column, with step placement based on experience.

Funding is available, and the alternative would be higher costs for contracted services.

MOTION:

On Motion of Jen Solak and second by Tracey Tierney

VOTED: to approve the Memorandum Agreement, by and between the district and the Teachers Association. The vote was unanimous.

MOTION:

ON Motion of Jen Solak second from Tracey Tierney

B. Northern Berkshire Education Collaborative - Call for representatives from each community

The School Committee discussed forming a community steering committee to guide a future study on district options such as regionalization or shared services, with plans to seek three community members through a public notice in addition to the School Committee Chair, aiming for balanced representation from Cheshire and Adams. The committee's work will begin after a consultant-led study is completed, with Phase One expected to take at least a year, and an RFP for consultants anticipated to run in January with selection in February. Members agreed to clarify that applicants are community representatives and to select members based on letters of interest rather than interviews, with a proposed submission deadline of December 30. The Committee also discussed concerns about state education funding formulas and emphasized the need to communicate potential financial impacts to the community.

104408

Action Items - none

104409

For the Good of the Order

Adam congratulated Anna the recipient of the Superintendent's award and stated how year after year they are brighter and brighter.

The School Committee discussed concerns raised by the Massachusetts Teachers Association regarding errors in the state's Chapter 70 funding formula and rural aid allocations, noting that an alternative formula supported by the MTA could result in a potential funding increase of over one million dollars for the district. Committee members had previously signed a letter to state leadership supporting this position, but emphasized the need for clearer internal communication to inform the community about the issue and its potential impacts on staffing, support services, special education, and overall district operations. Members agreed that waiting until town meetings would be too late and recommended drafting and distributing a communication to families early in the new year explaining the problem, its consequences, and providing contact information for state officials who can influence change. The Committee acknowledged that while it cannot change state policy, it must prepare the community for the consequences and advocate transparently.

MOTION:

On Motion of Adam Emerson and second by John Duval

VOTED: To adjourn the meeting at 8:18 p.m. The vote was unanimous.

Respectfully Submitted,

Aaron Dean, Superintendent

Mary Lisa Irizarry, Recording Secretary