

Seymour Board of Education



Special BOE Meeting – Budget Workshop #3

Minutes

January 20, 2026
Seymour Middle School
6:00 pm

Board Members Present: Kristen Bruno, Chairperson
Kristen Harmeling, Secretary
Stephan Behuniak
Jim Garofolo
Jay Hatfield
Lori Nespoli
Ed Strumello

Members Absent: Chris Champagne, Vice-Chairperson
Pete Kubik

Others Present: Dr. Susan Compton, Superintendent
Salvatore Bucci, Business Manager
Shannon Levey, Board Clerk

I. CALL TO ORDER

A. Pledge of Allegiance - Ms. Bruno called the meeting to order at 6:07 PM

II. PUBLIC COMMENT

Public Comment provides the opportunity for the public to make a comment. It is not a dialogue between the Board and the public. Based upon what is heard during Public Comment, the Board may choose to add a topic to the agenda. If questions are posed that the Chairperson is able to answer, those questions may be addressed under the Chairperson's Comments portion of the agenda. The Board will not discuss personnel matters. Comments should be respectful and no longer than 3 minutes in length so that all who wish to comment may have the opportunity to do so. All the public wanting to comment will need to state their name and address for the record prior to addressing the Board.

- Public Comment called three times, no comment.

III. DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION

A. Superintendent's Recommended 2026-2027 Education Budget

Dr. Compton presented the Superintendent's Recommended 2026–2027 Education Budget and referenced the accompanying PowerPoint slideshow, noting that it effectively highlights the work of the administration, staff, and students. She credited her administrative team for their strong collaboration on needs assessments and for identifying priorities while seeking creative, fiscally responsible solutions.

Dr. Compton reviewed the budget workbook and explained that the initial projection reflected a 4.9% increase. Through additional review and reductions, the recommendation was refined to a 4.7% increase to present a responsible proposal to the Board of Education, the Board of Finance, and taxpayers. She emphasized that costs continue to rise across all districts and that Seymour continues to do the best it can with available resources while remaining fiscally responsible.

Dr. Compton explained that the recommended 4.7% increase reflects roll-forwards, prior budgets, and current needs. She shared that she recently attended two superintendent meetings where the

Commissioner expressed hope that the Governor would increase funding for special education and potentially Educational Cost Sharing (ECS). However, she cautioned that such funding is not finalized and cannot be relied upon in the current budget planning. The special education budget currently totals approximately \$11 million, and the district continues to receive insufficient state and federal funding in this area.

Dr. Compton stated that investing in students is investing in the district's future and described students as the district's most valuable assets. She thanked the Board of Education for its continued support and thanked Mr. Bucci for the extensive time spent reviewing and refining the budget.

Dr. Compton reviewed the district mission and emphasized pride in Seymour Public Schools and the accomplishments achieved across the district. She presented the "District Profile at a Glance," noting that Seymour's per-pupil expenditure continues to decline and remains significantly lower than comparable districts, including Oxford, which spends approximately \$17,000–\$18,000 per pupil compared to Seymour's approximately \$13,000–\$14,000. She highlighted the diversity of the community, with 21 languages spoken, and reviewed the district's Strategic Plan priorities: student achievement; school climate and culture; community partnerships; learning environments, infrastructure, and fiscal stability.

Dr. Compton thanked Mr. Miller for his willingness to collaborate with the district. She reviewed historical and projected enrollment data, noting that enrollment remains relatively stable. Elementary class size projections remain consistent with the prior year, despite the elimination of three teaching positions in the budget.

The proposed 2026–2027 budget represents a 4.7% increase, which Dr. Compton stated is necessary to maintain current programming and services and should not require reduction by the Board of Finance. Salaries and benefits continue to represent the majority of the budget. Mr. Bucci distributed corrected graphs reflecting the 4.7% increase.

Dr. Compton reviewed the "Cliff Notes" summary, identifying areas where updates and reductions were made, including legal fees, supplies, energy, property and liability insurance, technology, and facilities.

Guiding principles for the budget include providing a high-quality educational program for all students, prioritizing operational efficiency, developing a budget respectful to taxpayers, and continuing collaboration with the town. Key budget drivers include salaries and benefits, increasing student needs, special education costs, and rising transportation costs.

Dr. Compton thanked Dr. Boyle for efforts to return some outplaced special education students, who are ready to transition back to in-district programming when appropriate, resulting in cost savings, while emphasizing that out-of-district placements remain necessary when required to meet student needs.

Staffing and cost considerations include health insurance premiums, tuition, and transportation, with transportation costs budgeted at a projected 13.5% increase. Dr. Compton expressed hope that the three buses purchased in collaboration with the town would help offset future transportation costs.

Mandated staffing requirements were reviewed, including the addition of a library media specialist at Seymour High School to meet accreditation requirements, with Mr. Lucke working to develop a 21st-century media center. A Speech and Language Pathologist position was included due to caseloads exceeding recommended limits, primarily driven by preschool needs. Three paraprofessionals are proposed to support the CARE program, with three CARE programs planned at Chatfield-LoPresti School based on student needs.

Dr. Compton explained that two teachers are retiring, one of which is a science teacher position and will be eliminated to reallocate funding to the library media specialist. Special education savings are anticipated through the return of some outplaced students to district programs.

Dr. Compton highlighted student and district accomplishments, including postsecondary acceptances, Career and Technical Education successes, AP Scholar recognition, Schools of Distinction awards, Red White & Blue Honored recognition, and individual staff and student honors. She emphasized that the district offers programs and opportunities for all students, including KinderCats, Preschool, CARE/REACH/RISE, STEM programs, forensic science, EMT, Griffin Allied Health, leadership programs, arts, athletics, and extracurricular activities.

Dr. Compton stressed the importance of providing the best possible learning environment despite challenging financial conditions and expressed gratitude for the collective efforts of staff, families, and the community.

Dr. Compton and Mr. Bucci explained the adjustments made to reduce the proposed increase from 4.9% to 4.7%, noting that both believe the recommendation is sufficient and responsible.

MOTION: (Jay Hatfield / Ed Strumello) move that the Board of Education adopt the Superintendent's Recommended Budget of \$43,291,819 for the 2026-2027 school year.

DISCUSSION:

Mr. Garofolo stated that the proposed increase is reasonable.

Ms. Harmeling clarified that district changes include the addition of three paraprofessionals, the creation of a third CARE program staffed through a transfer, and the Speech and Language Pathologist funded by the elimination of a science teacher position. Dr. Compton confirmed that additional administrative positions were not included and that the administration worked collaboratively to meet needs within available resources.

Mr. Strumello emphasized the importance of reaching out to state and federal legislators to advocate for increased education funding, particularly through in-person engagement.

Dr. Compton noted that many positions have been eliminated during her tenure and reiterated the district's commitment to living within its means while acknowledging ongoing facility needs. Mr. Miller discussed potential solar projects and joint planning efforts to direct excess energy revenue toward facilities. Ms. Bruno stressed the importance of learning from past facility challenges and prioritizing long-term planning. Dr. Compton suggested a future working session with the town to address facility needs, noting that the track remains the top priority.

Additional discussion addressed legal fees, Title I and IDEA grant concerns, energy costs, supply reductions, insurance premium timelines, transportation data, and the potential impact of enrollment changes on staffing. Mr. Behuniak noted that Seymour ranks near the bottom statewide for per-pupil expenditures yet continues to deliver strong outcomes, emphasizing the district's value.

AFFIRMATIVE: Mr. Behuniak, Ms. Bruno, Mr. Champagne, Mr. Garofolo, Ms. Harmeling, Mr. Hatfield, Mr. Kubik, Ms. Nespoli, Mr. Strumello

PASSES: 8-0-0

The Superintendent's budget now becomes the Board of Education's budget – \$43,291,819

IV. REPORTS

- A. Chairman's Report
- B. Superintendent's Report - Dr. Compton thanked the Board of Education for its continued support. She stated that the budget process is difficult and often heartbreaking, as the district is unable to provide everything it would like for students due to financial constraints. She emphasized that while the Board of Education has been supportive, it is critical that the proposed budget also receive support from the Board of Finance, the Board of Selectmen, and the broader community. Dr. Compton reiterated that these decisions are challenging and made with the best interests of students in mind.

Ms. Bruno noted the importance of community engagement and emphasized that voters should understand how much their participation and votes matter. She encouraged outreach to community members and stressed the importance of taxpayer involvement in education and budget decisions. Ms. Bruno also expressed appreciation for the community's support of the Bungay School referendum.

V. ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 7:41 PM

YouTube: Jan. 20, 2026 – SMS – 6 p.m. - <https://youtube.com/live/HnDLuHBrcL0?feature=share>

Prepared by Shannon Levey, Board Clerk