

New Hartford Public Schools
Board of Education Regular Meeting
7:00PM on Tuesday, February 24, 2026
Ann Antolini School - Library

PRESENT: Superintendent Jeffrey Sousa; Chair Timothy Klepps; Vice Chair Kristin Young

Board Members: Penny Miller (Secretary); Kirby Morante; Erik Perotti; Jon Puz; Frank Rodenberg; Timothy Russell

Absent: Thomas Buzzi

Also present: Kelly Carroll, Amy Kennedy, Michael Lynch, Heather Mathes, and Sara Voghel, along with other members of the public.

Timothy Klepps, Chair of the NHPS Board of Education, called the regular meeting to order at 7:00PM.

A. Pledge of Allegiance

B. Order of Business

C. Communications to the Board of Education/Public Comment

Chairman Timothy Klepps explained to the public for transparency that under the Board of Education bylaws (*using CABE*), he described how the Board of Education runs their meetings and public comment. The Board of Education bylaws are available on the NHPS website. Chairman Klepps explained Policy 9325 and went over the rules of the Chair of the Board. Correspondence can always be emailed to the Board Chair and the Superintendent. This correspondence would be included in the next Board of Education meeting.

Policy 9325

Jay Bailey - 575 Main Street

Mr. Bailey clarified if he has a question he can send an email, or get an answer at the next Board of Education meeting.

boe@newhctfd.org

D. Superintendent's Report

a. Special Education Update - Response from February 3, 2026 Question

Director of Student Services, Michael Lynch presented on Special Education within NHPS. There has been a dramatic increase in the past three years of the number of students who qualify for "Special Education". Jon Puz is hoping to help everyone understand the rise in Special Education, which cost dollars. Special Education is inline and has increased across the State of CT, this is not just happening in New Hartford. Mr. Lynch states the academic and social screening did not exist years ago, whereas children are now caught early on to have more informed and better measures to determine what students may need. There are a range of various services that a student needs. Services include needing a Speech Pathologist (this could be 20 minutes), or receive adult support throughout the entire day, student services sometimes require multiple people. Superintendent Jeffrey Sousa clarified Pre-K has State mandated requirements, Connecticut law does require reporting of Pre-K enrollment/participation data as part of the statewide public school information system, and the requirement is set out in statute. The Statutory Reporting Requirement Under Connecticut General Statutes § 10-10a (Public School Information System) are: Local and regional boards of education and preschool programs that receive state or federal funding must participate in the statewide public school data system. That participation includes reporting on: 1. Student experiences in preschool by program type and by number of months in each program and 2. Kindergarten readiness and student progress in kindergarten. This reporting was required annually beginning October 1, 2007, and thereafter as prescribed by the Commissioner of Education. All districts are required to provide special education services for eligible 3–5-year-olds with disabilities.

There are (44) students right now in the Pre-K program over three classrooms. Approximately \$70,000 comes in from preschool tuition. IDEA grant (611-age 3-21 and 619-preschool, age 3-5) supports roughly \$20,000. There are 16 students receiving Special Education in the Pre-K program. Full tuition costs may be adjusted for those who cannot afford Pre-K, they are not excluded, there is a process for low-income families through Mr. Lynch.

The cost for three certified teachers is: \$222,000

The cost for three para-educators = \$90,000

Total cost for staffing in preschool = \$312,000 (all students)

Cost of Pre-K program in New Hartford: \$312,000 (total) - \$70,000 (tuition) - \$20,000 (IEA grants) = \$222,000

The average cost for (1) outplaced student is \$150,000 per year (\$150,000 X 16 students = \$2,400,000)

The cost of a student to be outplaced far outweighs the cost to offer Pre-K education. Kirby Morante asked how the tuition rate is set. There is a base rate, and reduced rate, based on income and number of people in the family. Kirby Morante states the tuition rate for families is very reasonable. She inquired if the rate could be increased or adjusted. Mr. Lynch has raised the cost every other year, he tries to be mindful to have the tuition be affordable, income is not requested unless the family is requesting a reduced cost, therefore the tuition could not be raised for families whose income is greater. Michael Lynch noted the tuition has been raised about 3% every other year, and he continues to be mindful of the historical tuition rates. There are some towns who charge less and some that charge more. New Hartford is right about in the middle. Timothy Russell inquired if students have been turned away due to class size? Yes. For example: this year there are 22 slots, and already 28 have applied (which closes 3/01/2026), therefore the slots will definitely be filled. Timothy Klepps asked what the benefits are of students who receive the preschool service in district. The program is play based (research shows this has to be), when students are compared based on those who did not attend a preschool program to those students who did attend a preschool program, the students who attend a Pre-K program are more prepared, have the basics to be more successful and ahead of those students who did not. The three preschool teachers are both certified in Regular Education and Special Education. The preschool program allows for eyes on students earlier, which provides a better outcome for the student. When students who come into kindergarten without experience beforehand tend to struggle. Some additional highlights of the preschool program are the “book buddies” and “cooking club”. The book buddies in preschool get connected with a second grader to read a book. In the cooking club, preschoolers are using their hands, learning rules and more, this is a very interactive program. The three-year-old program is a half day program. Ms. Young clarified the direct comparison between preschool and daycare costs is not the same as the three-year-old program is a half day and daycare is a full day. The Pre-K program was started roughly six years ago. Mr. Perotti has a daughter who benefited greatly from the program, he highly recommends the program. Mr. Lynch says typically students start at a CREC school (*might be because there is not space or the fact that CREC schools offer before and after school care*), students generally don’t start in the Pre-K program then transfer to a CREC school. Kirby Morante agrees with Ms. Young based on three-year-olds, but disagrees based on four-year-olds because Kindergarten is a 6.5-hour day and preschool is a 6.25-hour day, the cost for preschool versus daycare for a four-year-old is comparable, and the preschool program is affordable. Superintendent Sousa expressed it is extremely beneficial to have a Pre-K program. He stated that Pre-K offered by schools ensure that children in town remain in town and in their neighborhoods rather than leave to go to another school system (CREC).

b. Budget Workshop #1 - Response to Questions Submitted (by Board of Education members) Regarding the 2026/2027 budget

2026 - 2027 Budget Workshop #1 Questions from the Board of Education

https://resources.finalsite.net/images/v1771961737/newhtfdorg/dyh0xuad57vir1at8lmx/BOEQuestions-BudgetWorkshop1_1.pdf

Superintendent Sousa received over (115) questions from the Board of Education members. The question asked at the last meeting, the answer please refer to the Capital in the budget book (page 50) the classrooms 25, 26 & 29 (Oak Hill). The classrooms need flooring, painting, window treatments, fix holes in the walls and cabinetry. The intended use will be left up to the recommendation the Board of Education receives from the conclusion of the School Faculty Utilization Task Force. The current projected budget is 3.96% or \$408,851 increase. Ms. Miller inquired if the preschool program will stay at three classrooms. Mr. Sousa stated, yes, there will be no increase to the program, based on the birth rates, which is the driving force the program will remain at three sections. If a student is determined to need Special Education they are automatically included in the Pre-K (*schools are not allowed to charge tuition for Special Education students in the preschool program*). Class sizes are determined based on the Board of Education policies. Jon Puz stated if a student came into district who required outplacement, there is potential for the non-lapsing account to cover the cost of said unforeseen cost. Members discussed the non-lapsing account, which is a contingency fund, used to cover unforeseen (*non-recurring/unplanned*) expenses. Surplus (*remainder after the auditing process*) up to 2% of the year’s budget may be motioned to the non-lapsing account by a vote of the Board of Education. The audit was presented at the last Board of Finance meeting. If there were issues, this would be presented by the auditors and the State of Connecticut. The question was asked if a position was ever to be added back into the budget, which would make the greatest difference? Mr. Sousa advocated for a full time Spanish program (*developed with Region 7*), and maintain two kindergarten sections at both schools. Additionally, he would advocate for two certified positions, a reading specialist and a math specialist. There are no expected increases or decreases for staffing at this time. The paraeducator position is being filled because of the current student need. The sixth-grade musical and overnight at White Memorial are the extracurricular activities which are being removed because of *liability* and *staffing* issues. Extracurricular activities included: White Memorial, MOEMS (Math Olympiads) and DARE (cost of nurses and busing). The SEED Grant is approved for two years, including the FY 26 & 27, with the intent to continue. The number of outplacements for 2026/2027 is anticipated to decrease by (1) from the

2025/2026 year. The potential “new services” mentioned by Michelle Miller (SP+A) are to utilize and invest in a in-district program to reduce the number of outplacements. Every school district must have a certified registered nurse, and the comparable market for registered nurses is significantly higher. The New Hartford Elementary nurse is not a certified registered nurse, and there is currently a second nurse at NHES for student’s medical need. Electricity costs are increasing significantly. There was a suggestion for adjust the Emergency Repair to 0, because the DRIP grant is available. Emergency repairs is a contingency. Kirby Morante expressed her concern regarding safety with Bakerville Consolidated School — as there is no sprinkler system currently in place. It should be considered to install a sprinkler system, if after the School Facility Utilization Task Force, it is recommended to maintain Bakerville Consolidated School long term. The roof project at New Hartford Elementary School is not included in the Capital Plan—pending the result of the School Facility Utilization Task Force recommendation to the Board of Education. The NHES roof was slated to be replaced, but has been paused (by the Board of Selectmen) because the State of CT would reimburse at a lower rate because of the lower student to square foot ratio than the State of CT would like to see. To be clear the roof at New Hartford Elementary was not declined by the State of CT. The State of CT would reimburse the Town a smaller percentage of the grant because of the enrollment to square footage ratio. *Student devices* are in the Capital budget, and the operating budget consists of: *staff computers, Promethean boards and battery backups*. The reason the classroom refresh was not completed in budget year 2025/2026 was because this project was not budgeted for. If Chromebooks are damaged—are always attempted to be fixed, if they are unable to be fixed, they will be replaced at the cost of the parents. Parents have the option to purchase insurance to cover the cost of such damage. Chromebooks are very closely monitored by IT, wherever the students access the internet, the configurations set are followed regardless, if not allowed by the school there will not be access. The Board of Education can explore the conversion from oil to propane to see if it is cost prohibitive. There is no Facilities Director, Mr. Sousa must function as such in addition to his role as Superintendent and other roles. The ARPA Mental Health Grant will expire for FY26. Jon Puz inquired if the \$100,000 for the oil tanks in Capital should be removed until after the resolution of the SFU-TF. Mr. Sousa implored the earmarked money not to be removed as he cannot manage removal and installation of 4 oil tanks in one summer. He provided many reasons why this is not feasible. **The 2026/2027 budget needs to be adopted by the Board of Education by the meeting conclusion on Tuesday March 3, 2026. This budget will go to the Board of Finance on Saturday March 14, 2026.** Ms. Miller requested to see an updated budget with the small changes which have been discussed. The Board of Education is audited via the Educational Finance System (EFS) which is much more granular in detail. This is in *addition* to the Town audit by King and King. Superintendent Sousa explained that the EFS is the *official platform* where all districts report Budgeted and actual expenditures, Revenues (local, state, federal), Object-level spending (salaries, benefits, purchased services, etc.), Function-level spending (instruction, transportation, administration, etc.), Staffing and financial breakdowns. The EFS is used to ensure uniform financial reporting across all districts, support calculation and analysis of state education grants (such as ECS), provide data for required state and federal reporting and *to ensure financial transparency and accountability*.

MOTION by Frank Rodenberg to maintain a proposed 2026/2027 budget at a 3.92% as presented including several minor adjustments. Second by Erik Perotti.

Timothy Russell feels the Board should bring the increase lower than 3.92%, around a 3%. Frank Rodenberg expressed he was surprised to see the budget proposed by the Superintendent under a 4% increase based on contractual increases. Ms. Miller would like to see the budget decreased to a 2.9%. Using last year’s budget, approximately \$110,000 would need to be cut from the budget to obtain a 2.9% increase. Mr. Perotti feels this budget (3.92%) should be proposed to the Board of Finance, Mr. Perotti feels cutting \$100,000 will affect the children directly. Timothy Russell and Penny Miller agree municipal taxes have increased year after year, and something must be reduced. Ms. Miller and Mr. Russell feel an acceptable increase would be a 2.9%. Mr. Perotti feels this is a very reasonable budget, with no reason to cut at this time, he feels the Board of Education should wait until the Board of Finance gives direction. Mr. Russell believes the paraeducator which is being vacated, should not be re-hired. Jon Puz reminded members the primary budget drivers are about 90% of the total 2026/2027 budget increase.

Aye: Erik Perotti, Jon Puz, Frank Rodenberg and Kristin Young

Naye: Timothy Klepps, Penny Miller, Kirby Morante and Timothy Russell

Abstain:

(4-4-0)
Motion Fails

MOTION by Timothy Klepps to request the Superintendent reduce the proposed 2026/2027 budget to a 3.3% increase or \$340,714. Second Timothy Russell.

Aye: Timothy Klepps, Kirby Morante, Timothy Russell and Kristin Young

Naye: Penny Miller, Erik Perotti, Jon Puz and Frank Rodenberg

Abstain:

(4-4-0)
Motion Fails

MOTION by Timothy Russell to reduce the proposed 2026/2027 budget to a 3.0% increase or a reduction of approximately \$99,000. Second by Penny Miller.

Penny Miller asked if the Board can use funds from the non-lapsing account for this budget. Frank Rodenberg advocated to maintain non-lapsing funds in the event there was an unknown outplacement. Mr. Russell feels \$10,000 is acceptable but not \$100,000.

Aye: Penny Miller, Kirby Morante and Timothy Russell

Naye: Timothy Klepps, Erik Perotti, Jon Puz, Frank Rodenberg and Kristin Young

Abstain:

(3-5-0)

Motion Fails

MOTION by Kristin Young to reduce the proposed 2026/2027 budget to a 3.43% increase or a reduction of \$54,714 or \$354,136. Second by Timothy Klepps.

Aye: Timothy Klepps, Kirby Morante, Jon Puz and Kristin Young

Naye: Penny Miller, Erik Perotti, Frank Rodenberg and Timothy Russell

Abstain:

(4-4-0)

Motion Fails

MOTION by Timothy Klepps to reduce the proposed 2026/2027 budget to 3.5% increase or a reduction of \$47,500. Second by Frank Rodenberg.

Aye: Timothy Klepps, Kirby Morante, Jon Puz, Frank Rodenberg and Kristin Young

Naye: Penny Miller, Erik Perotti and Timothy Russell

Abstain:

(5-3-0)

Motion Passes

MOTION by Timothy Klepps to remove \$20,700 for the classroom refresh (25, 26 & 29) from 2026/2027 Capital and use the non-lapsing account to fund said repairs at \$20,700. Second by Kirby Morante.

If by end of budget year 2025/2026, there is money remaining that said funds may be used for flexibility. Superintendent Jeffrey Sousa is asking for the motion not be constricted or limited if the maintenance line was not fully expended.

A-MOTION by Timothy Klepps to remove \$20,700 for the classroom refresh (25, 26 & 29) from 2026/2027 Capital and use either up to \$20,000 from the non-lapsing account or surplus funds from the maintenance line in the current operating 2025/2026 budget. Second by Kirby Morante.

UNANIMOUS

Motion Passes

- c. Legislative Advocacy Efforts - Share Efforts from Representative Anderson and Senator Honig Meetings

Superintendent Sousa publicly announced his desires for the School Facility Utilization Task Force, *he desires all options remain under review. To set the record straight, Mr. Sousa wants what the taxpayers of New Hartford want. He suggested reading the article recently posted from his interview with CT Insider.*

CT Insider Link

Board member Jon Puz left the meeting at 9:54PM.

E. Board of Education Chair's Report

a. General Topics

Chairman Timothy Klepps felt it was important to explain public comment to the community. Additionally, a letter was received from CAFE. What does the liaison for CAFE do? The CAFE liaison receives a brief monthly CAFE email newsletter and shares key highlights with the board. The liaison encourages board members to participate in CAFE programs, events, and professional learning

opportunities. The liaison serves as a two-way communication between CAFE and the New Hartford Board of Education. Kirby Morante is the CAFE liaison for the New Hartford Board of Education.

b. BOE Communication to the Community

Superintendent Sousa expressed that all those who wish to stay up to date with Education happening follow the New Hartford Public Schools on social media. Ms Miller asked if anyone reached out to Ms. Desantis (the Recreation/Senior Director) regarding contacting individuals who may not use a computer.

F. Routine Business

a. Approval of Minutes - February 3, 2026

MOTION by Kristin Young to approve meeting minutes from February 3, 2026. Second by Penny Miller.

UNANIMOUS
Motion Passes

b. Expenditure Report

MOTION by Kirby Morante to approve the Expenditure Report as presented. Second by Timothy Russell.

UNANIMOUS
Motion Passes

G. New Business

a. Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) Operational Memorandum No. 03-26: Requirements for Submitting the Healthy Food Certification (HFC) Statement for School Year 2026-2027

Vote for Healthy Food Certification (HFC):

Vote 1: Required vote for participation in healthy food option of HFC

MOTION by Timothy Klepps to vote yes on Vote 1 *"Pursuant to C.G.S. Section 10-215f, the New Hartford Board of Education certifies that all food items offered for sale to students in the schools under its jurisdiction, and not exempted from the Connecticut Nutrition Standards published by the Connecticut State Department of Education, will comply with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards during the period of July 1, 2026, through June 30, 2027. This certification shall include all food offered for sale to students separately from reimbursable meals at all times and from all sources, including but not limited to school stores, vending machines, school cafeterias, culinary programs, and any fundraising activities on school premises sponsored by the school or non-school organizations and groups"*. Second by Frank Rodenberg.

UNANIMOUS
Motion Passes

Vote 2: Required vote for food exemptions for BOE's voting "yes" to the healthy food option of HFC

MOTION by Timothy Klepps to vote yes on Vote 2, *"The New Hartford Board of Education will allow the sale to students of food items that do not meet the Connecticut Nutrition Standards provided that the following conditions are met: 1) the sale is in connection with an event occurring after the end of the regular school day or on the weekend; 2) the sale is at the location of the event; and 3) the food items are not sold from a vending machine or school store. An "event" is an occurrence that involves more than just a regularly scheduled practice, meeting, or extracurricular activity. For example, soccer games, school plays, and interscholastic debates are events but soccer practices, play rehearsals, and debate team meetings are not. The "regular school day" is the period from midnight before to 30 minutes after the end of the official school day. "Location" means where the event is being held and must be the same place as the food sales"*. Second by Frank Rodenberg.

UNANIMOUS
Motion Passes

H. Old Business

MOTION by Penny Miller to table “*Old Business*” until the next Board of Education meeting. Second by Frank Rodenberg.

MOTION-WITHDRAWN

- a. REVISION - Policy 3320 - Business/Non-Instructional Operations - Purchasing Procedures (*2nd Read*)
- b. REVISION - Policy 4152.6 / 4252.6 - Personnel - Family and Medical Leave Act (*2nd Read*)
- c. REVISION - Policy 6171 - Instruction - Special Education (*2nd Read*)
- d. REVISION - Policy 9132 - Bylaws of the Board - Standing Committees (*2nd Read*)
- e. REVISION - Policy 9230 - Bylaws of the Board - Orientation of Board Members (*2nd Read*)

MOTION by Penny Miller to approve Policy 3320, 4152.6 / 4252.6, 6171, 9132, and 9230. Second by Frank Rodenberg.

UNANIMOUS
Motion Passes

A. Public Comment - (For Agenda Items Only)

B. Reports

a. School Facility Utilization Task Force Update

The second meeting was held Thursday February 19, 2026. Kristin Young learned a lot from the School Facility Utilization Task Force meeting. There were questions by the public to have the floor plan map posted for viewing. The Board of Education feels this is a security measure to keep the location of children not publicized.

MOTION by Kristin Young to create a log of rooms with square footage and usage (*instructional or multi-purpose for example*) as a replacement of providing the public with a floor plan map. Second by Penny Miller.

UNANIMOUS
Motion Passes

Timothy Klepps felt to provide anybody with a map of the student’s locations is not good from a security standpoint. If the map is posted online that said map could end up anywhere.

Kristin Young expressed a request from the SFU-TF was to ask the Board of Education to provide the audio/video recordings, live streaming and viewable later as they do the Board of Education meetings. There is a cost associated with this and there has not been approved funding to do so

MOTION by Kristin Young to have the Board of Education fund the audio/recording necessary for the School Facility Utilization Task Force meetings. Second by Timothy Russell.

The cost roughly for the remaining posted SFU-TF meetings is from \$1,500-\$2,000, this was not budgeted for in the 2025-2026 budget year. Timothy Russell advocating his willingness to use the non-lapsing account. Kirby Morante expressed “the owl” is poor quality, it was very distracting as it picks up a lot of background noise and is constantly moving. She feels this topic should have proper audio because of its importance. Ms. Miller agrees, the funding would be worth being spent to have such service. The problem that is the SFU-TF wishes everyone be able to have public comment and have the Board of Education pay for the services. The SFU-TF is a Board of Education committee/task force and should follow Board of Education bylaws and policies. Public comment should be submitted via avenues such as email, rather than at the meetings. Timothy Klepps asked “What is the end goal here? Is it to enhance audio and video? Or allow for more and more public comment? Kirby Morante feels strongly this services is important for the public to hear and see the SFU-TF meetings but not as an avenue of public comment. Again, Kristin Young is asking for the support of the Board of Education. Kirby Morante feels if this service is so heavily requested by Kristin Young, the Board of Education should support it. Ms. Miller suggested the request be sent to the Board of Finance and Board of Selectmen to split the cost. **The next SFU-TF meeting is Wednesday March 11, 2026 at Bakerville Consolidated School at 7:00PM.**

A-MOTION by Kristin Young to request from the Board of Finance and Board of Selectmen, to split the cost of audio/recording (*three-ways, BOE, BOF & BOS*) necessary for the School Facility Utilization Task Force meetings. Second by Timothy Russell.

UNANIMOUS
Motion Passes

b. EdAdvance

MOTION by Penny Miller to table EdAdvance. Second Timothy Russell.

UNANIMOUS
Motion Passes

C. Adjournment

MOTION by Penny Miller to adjourn the meeting at 10:35PM. Second by Kirby Morante.

UNANIMOUS
Motion Passes

*Respectfully submitted by,
Elizabeth Domas, Recording Secretary*

Recorded Regular and Special Board of Education meetings will be posted to:
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCX-ZlomWmjG81dc_QM3rfg

Attachments:

2026-2027 Superintendents Proposed Budget – BOE Questions & Comments

Bright Futures Vol 1 Issue 2

February 6, 2026 Letter to Mark Anderson

February 6, 2026 Letter to Paul Honig

February 20, 2026 Letter to Paul Honig

February 20, 2026 Letter to Ned Lamont