

**New Hartford Public Schools
Board of Education Regular Meeting
7:00PM on Tuesday, May 5, 2026
Ann Antolini School – Library**

PRESENT: Superintendent Jeffrey Sousa; Chair Timothy Klepps

Board Members: Thomas Buzzi; Kirby Morante; Erik Perotti; Jon Puz; Frank Rodenberg; Timothy Russell

Absent: Penny Miller (Secretary) and Kristin Young (Vice Chair)

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

A. Pledge of Allegiance

B. Order of Business

MOTION by Jon Puz to add further discussion regarding the Pre-K Program under new business. Second by Timothy Russell.

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C. Communications to the Board of Education (5) / Public Comment

- 4/02/2026, Anonymous, World Autism Awareness Day, Mr. Sousa replied 4/06/2026
- 4/14/2026, Shannon Nicholas, Mr. Sousa replied on 4/22/2026, Concerns regarding planned transition from 4 sections of second grade to 3 sections third grade next year
- 4/16/2026 & 4/19/2026, Jay Alden Bailey, Finance Hearing/Expansion of Tax Liabilities
- 5/1/2026, Kevin McDonnell, Mowing at Bakerville Consolidated School

D. Superintendent's Report

a. Presentation of CABA Communications Award Plaque - by Leonard Lockhart, CABA's Current Past President
The New Hartford Board of Education and New Hartford Public Schools has been recognized by CABA issuing the Bonnie B. Carney Award of Excellence for Educational Communications, the award focuses on supporting students through district budget. The award criteria requirements include: *clarity of message, image and consistency, specificity guidelines of readability, editing, graphics, type, format, presentation, design, and the value of the expenditure.*

b. Student Representatives
Daisy Jones and Vivian Tsai, gave a presentation on the sixth-grade field trip to Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty.

c. Freedom of Information (FOIA)
Mr. Russell Blair, the guest speaker presented on rules and regulations of the Freedom of Information Act.

d. Legislative Advocacy Updates
The State of Connecticut has recently amended the FY26-27 budget increasing the Educational Cost Share (ECS) for New Hartford by \$172,353 and providing an additional \$22,147 for Municipal aid, an additional grand total of \$194,500 to the Town of New Hartford. The State of Connecticut has created a committee to investigate the formula, and may revisit changes to the formula moving forward. There has been advocacy to transition to zero emission school buses, which will be a significant cost if the transition to electric school buses is required, Mr. Sousa stated there will be advocacy to allow for sensible implementation, if required. There is a concern for electric busses in the Northwest corner in the cold weather. The Director of Student Services, Michael Lynch has continued to advocate for the Connecticut Junior Republic grant.

e. Kindergarten Enrollment
There are 55 students as of today (5/5/2026), there were 66 projected births from the Town Clerk's office, therefore enrollment is off by 11 students. 55 students will project 2 sections of 18 students at Bakerville School and 1 section of 19 students at New Hartford Elementary School, a total of 3 sections of 55 students. This may lead to a reduction in force (if necessary), and there is still time for additional students to sign up.

f. OSHA Update

Superintendent Sousa worked with CONN-OSHA, and has reported all issues have been resolved at Bakerville School. The next step is to move on to the next school, either Ann Antolini or New Hartford Elementary School.

g. IAQ Update (*Indoor Air Quality*)

NHPS has been awarded a grant of approximately \$2,000. Air monitors and air purification devices will be installed in the schools approximately (5) in each school, for free. UCONN is assisting with the install of these devices beginning in June, the devices remove impurities in the air to keep everyone healthy and safe.

h. Staff Update

Mr. Sousa announced a new team member (*made possible by the renewed mental health funding, Federal Rural Mental Health Grant*). The State of CT prioritized funding which has been extended through the FY 26-27 school year, this is a partnership with EdAdvance. Anna Gallant, a counselor at New Hartford Elementary School, provides individual and small group lessons and support for students navigating challenges such as emotions, friendship issues and more.

There are a total of 447 students today. Two students were recognized at the LCSA award banquet for the Litchfield County Superintendent Award, recipients are: Kaydence Wallace and Blake Bingham. Both students will be attending the next June 2, 2026 Board of Education meeting.

Frank Rodenberg feels the Board of Education is disconnected from the teachers; he would like direct feedback from the teachers at the Board of Education level. Chairman Klepps suggests further discussion happen at the Policy Subcommittee first, then at a Board of Education level with an agenda item. Mr. Rodenberg agreed, and would like to hear from teachers at the Policy Subcommittee level.

E. Board of Education Chair's Report

Chairman Timothy Klepps stated there is misinformation in the community regarding the next two topics and the purpose of this discussion is to set the record correctly at the Board level.

a. Pre-K Sections

Chairman Klepps informed everyone that the Board of Education **did** publicly announce the additional third section of Pre-K in May of 2025 at a Board meeting, specifically on May 6, 2025. This was done by the Board of Education openly and transparent with strong reasons behind the additional section. The third section of Pre-K was added by the rationale of: *1-a community waitlist, 2-to retain students in district and 3-have students receive early Special Education with New Hartford students instead of outplacement*. The 2025 budget season was a challenge for the Board of Education. The budget referendum failed on May 6, 2025 **because public input in connection to the removal of the Clerical Aide and Instructional Assistant positions**. The Board of Education cut the \$66,000 (CA & IA). These two positions (CA & IA) were then restored by the Board of Finance on May 19, 2025 (same amount of \$66,000). The Board of Education adopted a revised budget, including the restoration of the two said positions, which then passed at the second budget referendum on June 10, 2025. The third section of Pre-K was a part of the original budget, and not the reason for a failure of the budget. The \$66,000 had no relation to the Pre-K program (additional section), but rather the two restored positions of the Clerical Aide and Instructional Assistant. This is misinformation that was also clarified again at the Board of Education meeting on March 3, 2026. Information spread through the community that Pre-K was added by the Board of Education "*after the fact*" **is incorrect**, and absolutely not the case. The third Pre-K section was included in the first (*original*) budget and second (*revised*) budget presented at both referendums, and was adopted by the community for good reason. The Board of Education transparently discussed the additional third section because of the need within the Town.

b. Superintendent Responsibilities

The Board of Education and NHPS has always consciously had the desire to maintain the Superintendent position as full-time and supported the position this way. Misinformation regarding the full-time position has circulated in the community, stating New Hartford does not need a full-time Superintendent. Other districts, such as West Hartford have been used as a comparison, although comparing New Hartford to West Hartford is comparing apples to oranges.

Chairman Klepps researched West Hartford's school district. If you look at West Hartford, the school district there has: **2 Assistant Superintendents (1 for administration and 1 for curriculum instruction), an Executive Director of Human Resources, Executive Director of Equity Advancement, Director of Plan Facility, Director of School Safety and Security, Director of Talented and Gifted, Director of Elementary and Secondary Education, Assistant Directors of Pupil Services, Supervisors of Early Childhood, Business Officials, Executive Directors to 16 Principals to Department Supervisors to Secondary Assistant Principals.**

The many positions in West Hartford's school district are wrapped into one position of the Superintendent of Schools in New Hartford. It is important to remember all the services being offered in a school system like West Hartford (10 times the size of New Hartford), also have to be provided in New Hartford, the same services are offered. In New Hartford 1 individual does the job of many many positions (listed above) in a district like West Hartford. The Superintendent of Schools position in the Town of New Hartford is 1 individual who "wears many hats". There is valid reason for a full time Superintendent here in New Hartford and this has been a

conscious effort by the Board of Education maintain this. Timothy Russell and Erik Perotti, thanked Superintendent Sousa for his hard work and dedication to the Town of New Hartford.

F. Routine Business

- a. Approval of Minutes - February 24, March 3, and March 24, 2026

MOTION by Jon Puz to approve meeting minutes from February 24, March 3 and March 24, 2026. Second by Timothy Russell.

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- b. Expenditure Report

MOTION by Jon Puz to approve the Expenditure Report as presented. Second by Kirby Morante.

The certified salaries are under budget because of several unpaid medical leaves and the associated employee benefits. Additionally, there has been a change in outplacements (*which is a cost savings*), therefore the line is approximately \$150,000 under budget.

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G. New Business

- a. Discuss and take action on 2024-2025 audit completion by King & King. Board of Education will vote on \$2,863 under 24/25 budget into the non-lapsing account.

MOTION by Timothy Russell to place \$2,863 into the Board of Education non-lapsing account. Second by Jon Puz.

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- b. Discuss and take action on motion amendment for funding Silver Petrucelli and Associates (SPA) contract.

Mr. Sousa explained a request to amend an original motion from December 15, 2025 for more financial flexibility because there are cost savings now.

The original motion read:

"MOTION by Penny Miller to consider the use and approval of \$28,500 from the non-lapsing account to fully fund and award the School Facility Utilization Request for Proposal to Silver Petrucelli & Associates. Second by Timothy Russell.

Aye: Timothy Klepps; Penny Miller; Kirby Morante; Jon Puz; Frank Rodenberg; Timothy Russell; Kristin Young

Naye: Thomas Buzzi

Abstain:

(7-1-0)"

The request is to have a revised motion to amend the original motion from 12/15/2025, to use either \$28,500 from the non-lapsing account or surplus funds from the maintenance line in the current 25-26 operating budget to fund the SP+A contract to hold to some reserves in the non-lapsing account in the case of any emergencies.

MOTION by Kirby Morante to amend the funding of SP+A for up to \$28,500 from the non-lapsing account or the current 25/26 operating budget. Second by Erik Perotti.

Aye: Timothy Klepps, Kirby Morante; Erik Perotti; Jon Puz; Frank Rodenberg; Timothy Russell

Naye: Thomas Buzzi

Abstain:

(6-1-0)

Motion Passes

- c. Pre-K Programming (*Topic Added to the Agenda by the First Motion*)

The purpose of this discussion is to assist the Board of Education members on the SFU-TF while being mindful of the Board of Education. Jon Puz explained there are questions which would be helpful to have answered. The questions are administrative. Some questions are similar to: the reason for the additional section of Pre-K, fundamentals of the Pre-K program, what services are required in this program, what is being done in the program and why? There has been a lot of public input and questions based on this program in the SFU-TF discussion. Mr. Puz explained it would be beneficial to allow Jon to sit down with Michael Lynch and Superintendent Sousa, to compile answers to the questions, to have information to bring back to the SFU-TF. The questions on the concepts of the program, requirements, how the education is being delivered, staffing and program costs/tuition, is an important aspect for the community to understand what's being done and why. Then this information can be communicated to the SFU-TF and the community,

which is beneficial to SFU-TF planning. The community needs to understand why certain spaces are needed. Timothy Klepps feels there is no reason not to supply this information to the community. He emphasized the importance of the reason for the Pre-K program and why the program is important to NHPS (“*What does the program do for us?*”). There is misunderstanding and a lack of understanding for why this program is in place. Kirby Morante suggested a frequently asked questions section on the NHPS website, this topic is a good example of information to include. Based on the discussion Jon Puz and Kristin Young will meet with Michael Lynch and Superintendent Sousa.

H. Old Business

- a. REVISION - Policy 3516.5 - Sexual Offenders on School Property (*2nd Read*)
- b. REVISION - Policy 3541.313 - Video Cameras on School Transportation (*2nd Read*)
- c. NEW - Policy 6144.1 - Instruction - Exemption from Instruction (*2nd Read*)

MOTION by Thomas Buzzi to adopt **Policy 3516.5 - Sexual Offenders on School Property**, **Policy 3541.313 - Video Cameras on School Transportation** and **Policy 6144.1 - Instruction - Exemption from Instruction**. Second by Timothy Russell.

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I. Public Comment - (For Agenda Items Only)

J. Reports

- a. EdAdvance
N/A

- b. School Facility Utilization Task Force

Jon Puz updated the board on the progress of the School Facility Utilization Task Force. He reminded those interested the section on the NHPS website which includes all information to date. The SFU-TF has had meetings roughly every two weeks. SP+A studied the facilities, by priority and by school. Programming & Capacity has been published. The next meeting is Wednesday May 13, 2026. This past Saturday May 2, 2026 from 1:00PM-3:00PM, where some individuals stayed past 4:00PM. The informational session was led by Michelle Miller (SP+A). There is another public informational meeting Tuesday May 19, 2026 at 5:30PM. SP+A is working to refine options. There have been two Subcommittees created: the Stakeholder Engagement Subcommittee (gather input) and the Financial Impact Subcommittee (determine financing implications to taxpayers). The overtime of the project is on track. The goal of the SFU-TF will be to bring 1 or 2 options to the Board of Education at the conclusion of the study. Chairman Klepps asked Mr. Puz how the public participation has been, Mr. Puz feels the turnout is much lower now than what it was early on. Engagement is high for those individuals who do attend meetings, although both in person and virtual views have dropped.

K. Executive Session

- a. To discuss an attorney-client privileged memo

MOTION by Jon Puz to enter Executive Session at 8:54PM and invite Superintendent Sousa to join. Second by Kirby Morante.

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Everyone in attendance left the meeting.

The Board of Education members in attendance and Superintendent Sousa remained for Executive Session.

Motions following Executive Session were provided by Superintendent Sousa to the Recording Secretary.

L. Adjournment

MOTION by Kirby Morante to adorn the meeting at 9:12PM. Second by Jon Puz.

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*Respectfully submitted by,
Elizabeth Domas, Recording Secretary*

Recorded Regular & Special Board of Education meetings will be posted to:
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCX-ZlomWmjG81dc_QM3rfq

Attachments:

(5) Communications to the Board of Education (*listed above*)
Student Presentation (Ellis Island & Statue of Liberty)
FOIA 101 - Presentation (Russell Blair)