

LAMOILLE NORTH MODIFIED UNIFIED UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT
ANNUAL MEETING MINUTES
GMTCC COMMUNITY EDUCATION CENTER
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2026

Board members present: Cambridge –Mark Stebbins, Denise Webster, Nancy Guyette, Susan Prescott, Amy Listenik*; Eden – Jeff Hunsberger, Tiffany Cochran; Hyde Park – Patty Hayford, Tina Lowe, Phil Kiely; Johnson – Mark Nielsen, Monica Stearns, Kyley Hill, Kyle Nuse*; Waterville – Bart Bezio; Belvidere – Stephanie Sweet;

Board members absent: Cambridge – Jan Sander; Hyde Park – Lisa Jones; Johnson – Carri Ferrari

Administrators present: Catherine Gallagher, Deborah Clark, Paula Beattie, Cole Hayes, Rene Thibault, Diane Reilly, Jeremy Scannell, Michele Aumand, Dane VanNosdein, Kimberly Hunt, Christopher Dodge, Christopher Hennessy, Carrie Bullard, Erik Remmers

Others present: Dan Noyes, Richard Bailey, community members and town clerks

*remote attendance

Mark Nielsen called the meeting to order at 7:03.

Article I:

To determine whether Roberts Rules (Revised) or other rules of order shall govern the parliamentary procedures of the meeting

Mark Nielsen asked for unanimous consent to use Roberts Rules (Revised). There were no objections.

Article II:

To review and approve the minutes of the February 17, 2025 Annual Meeting

It was moved and seconded to approve the minutes of the February 17, 2025 Annual Meeting and the motion was passed by a voice vote.

Article III:

To elect by ballot the following officers: a) Moderator; b) Clerk; c) Treasurer

Bart Bezio nominated Mark Nielsen for Moderator. **Mark Nielsen was elected Moderator by a voice vote.**

Kim Moulton nominated Donna Griffiths for Clerk. **Jeff Hunsberger moved to elect Donna Griffiths as Clerk and the motion was seconded and passed by a voice vote.**

Donna Griffiths nominated Kim Moulton for Treasurer. **It was moved and seconded to elect Kim Moulton as Treasurer and the motion was passed by a voice vote.**

Article IV:**To establish compensation for the duly constituted officers and the Board of Directors of said Modified Unified Union School District**

A slide with current and proposed compensation was shown. The proposed compensation for the clerk was \$600/year plus mileage and \$150 per additional vote. The proposed compensation for the treasurer was \$8000/year. Proposed compensation for the board chair was \$1900/year and for the other board members it was \$1600/year.

Bart Bezio moved to accept the proposed compensation for officers and the Board of Directors and the motion was seconded and passed by a voice vote.**Article V:****To hear and act upon the reports of the Modified Unified Union School District**

M. Nielsen said if there were no objections Deb Clark and Catherine Gallagher (who are not residents of the district) would speak. There were no objections.

C. Gallagher said public education is one of the most essential promises a community makes to its children and future. It is an equalizer and a catalyst for opportunity. The budget is not just about expenses and revenues. It represents a shared commitment to ensuring that every student is safe, challenged and supported. Schools today serve as academic institutions and also as providers of mental health services, food access, childcare, etc. The budget reflects thoughtful planning, community feedback and a deep commitment to equity. C. Gallagher invited those we see only at annual meetings to visit our classrooms and schools.

Over the past 5 years community engagement has surged. This year, more than 550 people came to the outdoor event put on in partnership with the Flynn Center and 150 came to see the Gone Guys documentary. Last fall several hundred participated in a community survey and told us what they wanted us to prioritize. Four priorities were clear: academic rigor/strong classroom resources, co-curricular activities, mental health/student supports and safety and security. We built the budget around community input.

C. Gallagher presented some data on academic growth. An assessment of fall to winter growth in 2026 showed that 66% of elementary students met or exceeded national growth expectations in reading, including 20% with high growth. A little over 72% met or exceeded growth expectations in math, including 23% with high growth. Five years ago, 13% showed growth in reading and 33% showed growth in math. We still have more to do, but students are showing more growth due to professional development, programs we are using, and engagement of students and staff.

Thirty percent of our students take advanced placement courses and 85% of those pass with a score of 3 or above. There are 106 seats being taken by our students for AP exams.

Average daily attendance so far this year is 93.55%. The state average is about 90%. The percentage of chronically absent students for LNSU is currently 7.5 %. The state average is over 20%.

GMTCC had 119 students in fall 2023 and has 158 this year.

Participation in clubs and athletics at LUHS has increased from 242 in 2021 to 576 today. (Some students are involved in more than one club.) The increase at the middle school was from 201 to 286.

Two students spoke about how valuable their participation in student council, athletics, arts programs, AP classes, volunteering, etc. has been in developing their confidence and helping them grow.

C. Gallagher said to increase school safety and security we have implemented an alert system called Centegix. There are school teams in all buildings who respond to events and we have the opportunity to have the sheriff's department, EMS or the fire department respond if there is a more serious situation.

This budget is not accidental. It is in response to what the community asked for.

We have had 30 positions in the last 2 years that were either not filled or cut. The largest increases in the budget are personnel benefits costs. Health insurance is determined at the state level. Other cost drivers outside of local control are environmental health mandates, universal services/preK expansion, retirement and pension obligations, and childcare employer payroll tax.

What hasn't changed is our commitment to strong instruction, our focus on student well-being, our responsibility to keep schools safe, and our obligation to plan sustainably.

We know property taxes matter. There is no direct correlation between education spending and property taxes. An example of this is Cambridge. Their budget is decreasing by 3.68% and their property taxes are increasing. One reason for their decrease is that they paid off their bond. Education spending is one piece of a larger equation that includes state policy decisions, funding formulas and external cost drivers such as property values, grand list changes, and municipal and county budgets. We can care about students and be mindful of tax impact.

Article VI:

To receive from the Board of School Directors of said District its estimate of expenses of the Lamoille North Modified Unified Union Grade Schools for the ensuing year. This is a public information hearing regarding the budget. (See Article XII.)

D. Clark said the FY27 elementary budget has a 6.9% general fund increase. Over 76% of the budget is directly related to community priorities of instruction, classroom resources, school safety/security and student supports. Less than 3% is for administration. The state average for percentage of budget going to administration is 6-7%.

Personnel costs represent a majority of the budget increase. The largest percentage of growth (nearly 16%) is for statewide negotiated health benefits. Since benefits started being negotiated at the state level, the cost of the most commonly chosen plan has risen from \$17K to almost \$44K. Other benefits include mandatory items such as contributions to the statewide retirement system, the recently enacted early education payroll tax, workers' comp insurance, and the Social Security/Medicare match.

The current budget reflects a reduction of about 9 elementary school positions. Some are vacant in the current year. Over the last 2 budget cycles we have reduced staffing by about 30 full-time positions through a combination of reductions and vacancies.

There has been a change in elementary enrollment relative to high school/middle school enrollment. Elementary schools are now carrying a bigger percentage of the cost for shared student support services.

The increase in spending per student at the elementary schools is 4.31%. The long term weighted average daily membership increased by almost 50, holding down per pupil spending.

At the elementary level, the LNMUUSD towns pay about 39% of the budget locally. The rest comes from the state treasury. For every \$39 we invest, we get \$61 from the rest of the state.

Article VII:

To receive from the Board of School Directors of said District its estimate of expenses of the Lamoille North Modified Unified Union Middle & High Schools for the ensuing year. This is a public information hearing regarding the budget. (See Article XIII.)

D. Clark said the FY27 middle school and high school budget shows a 4.13% overall increase. Over 80% of the budget is directly related to the community priorities identified in the survey: co-curricular opportunities, instruction/classroom resources, safety/security and student supports. Less than 3% is for administration.

Personnel cost drivers represent the majority of the increase. Health benefit expenses are increasing by nearly 18%. There is a reduction of about 9 positions that have been vacant this year. There is a minimal increase under "Other Expenses." The elementary budget took a lot of that increase based on enrollment numbers. Education spending per pupil is up 5.74% (more than the budget increase) due to loss of students. Forty-five percent of the current year budget is collected locally. For every \$45 we invest we get another \$55.

D. Clark showed how our spending per long term weighted ADM compares with other school districts. At the elementary level it is just below the statewide forecast average and at the secondary level we are down near the bottom of our cohort.

To forecast tax rates we are using the governor's recommended yield number based on his buy-down request. Once we apply the Common Level of Appraisal to adjust appraised values to market values, tax rate changes in LNMUUSD towns range from -0.26 to 6.54%.

Because there is a statewide education budget, we benefit by getting a return on our investment from other parts of the state.

Article VIII:

To receive from the Board of School Directors of said District its estimate of expenses of the Green Mountain Technology & Career Center for the ensuing year. This is a public information hearing regarding the budget. (See Article XIV.)

D. Clark said personnel costs are the main driver in the tech center budget. Healthcare costs are pushing the budget up. Growth in tech center enrollment is putting more weight for shared services on the tech center. She showed how tech center tuition is calculated. For FY27 there will be a 4% tuition increase. The increase per student is about \$37.

Articles V-VIII:

D. Clark said the FY25 treasurer's report shows an increase in total cash balances as of June 30, 2025. This was due primarily to the timing of the tax anticipation note pay-off.

The elementary budget for FY27 is \$19,154,689. Combined ed spending is \$17,210,753. The secondary budget for FY27 is \$21,956,152. Combined ed spending is \$20,067,333. The tech center general fund budget is \$4,555,903.

Article IX:

Shall the voters of Lamoille North Modified Unified Union School District #058A rename the reserve fund established for the purpose of meeting the Health Reimbursement Arrangement & Health Savings Account needs of the Lamoille North Modified Unified Union School District #058A from HRA Special Reserve to Benefits Reserve, and change the purpose of the reserve to meet the Health Benefits needs of the Lamoille North Modified Unified Union School District #058A?

D. Clark said when we first went to a statewide health plan, it came with health savings accounts and health reimbursement arrangements. We didn't have experience with HRAs, so the first year we budgeted 100% of the potential cost. We did not use 100%. The board decided to build a reserve fund with the excess money. We have not had to use it. We are now budgeting about 87% of potential expenses. The reserve for the elementary schools has \$78,500. We have not had to use it in 8 or 9 years. This article is asking to rename it to Benefits Reserve and to change the purpose to meet health benefit needs. In the next few years, if we have capped spending and increasing premiums or if more employees are switching to more expensive plans, we could tap into it.

Bart Bezio moved to rename the reserve fund established for the purpose of meeting the Health Reimbursement Arrangement & Health Savings Account needs of the Lamoille North Modified Unified Union School District #058A from HRA Special Reserve to Benefits Reserve, and change the purpose of the reserve to meet the Health Benefits needs of the Lamoille North Modified Unified Union School District #058A. The motion was seconded.

Kim Dunkley asked about the difference between Article IX and Article X. D. Clark said this article is for the elementary level and Article X is for the middle school and high school.

A voter asked why we are voting on this today. D. Clark said this body voted to create the reserve with a specific name and purpose, so this body needs to approve the change.

There was a question about the benefit of changing the name. D. Clark said it broadens the use of the funds to benefits in general. We haven't needed to use it for its original purpose.

A voter asked how many years D. Clark thinks we can get out of the reserve. D. Clark said we could get a couple of years or just one.

The motion was passed by a voice vote.

Article X:

Shall the voters of Lamoille North Modified Unified Union School District #058B rename the reserve fund established for the purpose of meeting the Health Reimbursement Arrangement & Health Savings Account needs of the Lamoille North Modified Unified Union School District #058B from HRA Special Reserve to Benefits Reserve, and change the purpose of the reserve to meet the Health Benefits needs of the Lamoille North Modified Unified Union School District #058B?

D. Clark said this article is the same as Article IX, but related to the middle school and high school. The amount in the reserve is \$72,882.

B. Bezio moved the article as presented and it was seconded and passed by a voice vote.

Article XI:

To transact any other business to properly come before the meeting.

Lynn Sibley asked when she can ask questions about this budget. M. Nielsen said people can ask questions next Monday at the informational meeting. D. Clark said if anyone wants to come in and meet with her, she can go through the budget.

Mike Patch asked if any legislators want to explain anything about finances. Rep. Dan Noyes said he is happy to meet with anyone. He knows there have been some reductions in healthcare costs that would otherwise have been higher due to limiting what UVM Medical can charge. He knows there will be more changes this legislative session. The yield and income sensitivity rate have not been set yet. The legislature is still going through the budget. The Education Committee may make changes. Healthcare costs are a major driver.

Richard Bailey said the healthcare plan negotiated statewide is one of the higher rated plans. He doesn't know if it could be negotiated to move from Gold to Bronze or Silver.

Rob Rodriguez asked what percentage of the healthcare premium is paid by employees. Paula Beattie said 80% is paid by the district and 20% is paid by the employee.

At 8:00, Mark Nielsen recessed the meeting to March 3, 2026 (Town Meeting Day) for the purpose of voting by Australian ballot at the usual polling places in the member districts.

Articles XII, XIII and XIV:

On March 3, 2026, ballots were brought to the LUHS library, where they were commingled and counted under the supervision of the LNMUUSD clerk. The number of ballots cast for Article XII was 823. Results of the vote for Article XII (the PreK-6th grade budget) were 482 in favor, 340 opposed, and 1 blank. **Article XII was passed.**

The number of ballots cast for Articles XIII and XIV was 1133. Results of the vote for Article XIII (the middle school/high school budget) were 678 in favor, 452 opposed, 2 blank and 1 spoiled. **Article XIII was passed.** Results of the vote for Article XIV (the GMTCC budget) were 828 in favor, 299 opposed, and 6 blank. **Article XIV was passed.**

Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths