



FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING PUBLIC MINUTES

Friday, October 9, 2026

8:30 a.m.

Committee Members: Rich Pieros, Chair
Anna Barton, Paulo Lopes, David Rizza

Administrative Staff: Dr. Jonathan Hart, Superintendent
Jason Bohm, SBA/Board Secretary
Don Race, Facilities Manager (absent)

1. Referendum Projects - [Public](#) referendum tracker (FS)

- a. **PA System** - system quote for all schools has come under budget by \$89k. The new system will include areas previously not addressed e.g. building exteriors, bathrooms etc.
- b. **Other Projects** - In progress and on track for summer 2027, see public tracking document on District website for details.
- c. **Solar** - Easement legal documents signed by the township. The 2027 installation on schedule. The solar project must be operable by December 2027 for the vendor to qualify for energy grants.

2. Transportation Routing Public Request for Pickup in Developments (HC&B)

- a. The committee discussed a summary document outlining bus route considerations related to **Mandatory State Requirements and Existing District Best Practices and Operational Guidelines**.
 - i. For details, see the “Reference Material for Bus Transportation” section below in these meeting minutes.
 - ii. The committee discussed the goal of school bus transportation: to ensure that students arrive at and return from school safely and within acceptable time frames. The committee noted that all existing District bus routes meet these objectives.
- b. At the beginning of the 2025–2026 school year, residents of the Sanderson Court development requested changes to the school bus route serving their development. The route currently has one stop at the top of Sanderson Court, adjacent to Route 28. Residents requested that the route be modified to enter the development and include additional stops. The matter was discussed at a Finance Committee meeting. The administration reported that it had analyzed the request and determined that adding

stops would extend the total route time beyond acceptable limits (from 45 to 51-53 minutes) and may lead to students being late for school. The administration also noted that other developments have similar bus routing arrangements and that changing the Sanderson Court route could necessitate changes to similar routes elsewhere in the District. The administration recommended maintaining the existing routes. This recommendation was communicated to the Sanderson Court residents who had contacted the District

c. At the September 8, 2026 BOE meeting, community members from Sanderson Court asked the Board to overturn the administration's decision. Bus routing is an administrative function, and the administration is responsible for developing and implementing bus routes. The Board may request that the administration analyze routing concerns and present options and recommendations for the Board's consideration.

d. The administration performed an analysis of all routes in the district with similar configurations as Sanderson Court (0.5 miles or longer and no critical safety issues in entering the development).

i. Route time results with current resources

- Average increase in route times: **10 minutes, 20 seconds.**
- Average route time: **51 minutes, 30 seconds.**
- Routes exceeding 45 minutes: **36, compared with 7 currently.**
- Routes under 45 minutes: **12, compared with 41 currently.**
- Implementation of this modification in a fair and consistent manner would result in students being late to school, and actual route times would compound due to stacking nature (same buses used at multiple schools).

ii. Resources needed to implement routes to maintain acceptable bus route times:

- 4 additional buses and 1 additional spare bus: **\$842,000**
- Additional staff: **\$339,000**
- Upfront costs for 2027/2028: **\$1,181,000**
- Recurring costs each subsequent year: **\$339,000**
- Lead time on purchasing new buses is over one year. Pre-owned buses may be an option; however, potential savings could be offset by higher maintenance costs, a shorter useful life, and the need for earlier replacement.
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e. Options

- 1. Keep current bus routes.** Continue operating bus routes as currently configured.
- 2. Implement changes uniformly across all routes.** Implement bus route changes uniformly across the District. The estimated cost of implementation is \$1,181,000, which the District does not currently have funding to cover. Funding the changes would require an approximately 3% increase in the tax levy in the upcoming budget cycle. Additionally, health care costs are

anticipated to be a major budget driver, and the bus route changes would add to the financial pressures in the budget.

3. **Modify the criteria used when updating bus routes so that fewer routes are affected.** Potential criteria could include developments located more than 0.75 miles from an existing bus stop; or stops along high-traffic roads; or stops with 15+ students. This approach would still require additional resources, although potentially fewer buses and staff than a uniform implementation. The associated costs would need to be funded through tax levy increases. Additionally, not all developments would benefit from the revised routing criteria.
4. **Make an exception for Sanderson Court.** Modify the bus route to enter the Sanderson Court development and add stops. This change would increase the route time for all students on the route by approximately 6–8 minutes and could result in students arriving late to school. Students who do not live in Sanderson Court but ride the same route would also be affected. Other developments with similar routing arrangements could request similar exceptions, potentially creating pressure to implement broader changes under Option 2 or Option 3.

3. Legal Billing Tracking / Availability (FS)

- a. The current practice followed for processing legal bills is
 - i. The District receives bills at the end of each month
 - ii. Each administrator that is authorized to contact the Board attorney reviews the bills individually and signs them.
 - iii. The Business Office recalculates bills to verify mathematical accuracy
 - iv. The bills are scanned into the District's accounting software
 - v. The bills are placed on the bill list for a Board vote before payment is issued, consistent with the process for all bills.
 - vi. The BOE President, Finance Committee Chair, and Business Administrator sign the bill list each month. Alternate BOE members may also sign the bill list as needed.
- b. Historically, the District has received OPRA requests and requests from Board members for legal bills. In response to Board member requests, the District has historically provided a summary memo of the requested bills. If a copy of a bill is provided to the requester, the Board attorney is asked to redact the bill and the District is charged for the time spent on redaction.
- c. The committee discussed potential changes to District practices to facilitate requests for legal bills while minimizing the administrative burden and attorney costs associated with redaction.
 - i. Request attorney offices to provide a summary of all bills each month
 - ii. Request attorney offices to provide two versions of the bills: the current unredacted version and a redacted version. The committee discussed the possibility of providing only the redacted version but noted that the

unredacted version provides needed context, particularly when reviewing older bills.

iii. Making the summary and redacted bills available to BOE each month.

d. The Business Administrator will report back to the committee on the results of his discussions with the attorney offices.

4. Budget Pressures 2027-2028 (FS)

a. The committee discussed high level estimates on cost drivers for the 2027/2028 school year, with health insurance being the biggest cost driver.

5. QSAC & More Audits (Cafeteria, Medicaid) (FS) – Did not discuss due to time constraints

6. Draft Board Goals – Did not discuss due to time constraints

7. Finance Agenda Items - PA System award, police MOA, \$1K RMS grant tied to Trees for Schools, surplus auction (bus), M-1 & Comprehensive Maintenance Plan, Somerset County Cooperative (bus repair), \$350 settlement

8. Bills List - Standard

9. Next meetings shall be ____TBD_____.
Upcoming topics: referendum & construction projects, budget, bus routes

Reference Material for Bus Transportation

Mandatory State Requirements (N.J.A.C. 6A:27)

All routes must be engineered in compliance with New Jersey Administrative Code regulations. Any deviation from these metrics constitutes a legal violation and risks the forfeiture of State transportation aid. At a high-level, code requires:

- **Mandatory Transportation Eligibility (Remote Status):** Transportation must be provided to all public and nonpublic school students who reside "remote" from their assigned school of attendance. For students at or below Grade 8, the distance is beyond 2.0 miles from their school.
- **Students with Disabilities:** Transportation must be provided in strict accordance with the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP). Case managers must provide route planners with specific safety, behavioral, and equipment needs.
- **Nonpublic, Charter and Choice Program Students:** Eligible nonpublic, charter, and interdistrict public school choice students must reside remote from their school (i.e. more than 2 miles), provided the school is located within the state and not more than 20 miles from the student's residence. Expenditures for these routes are legally capped at the annual statutory maximum per student; if exceeded, aid in lieu of transportation must be processed.
- **Homeless and Vulnerable Students:** Homeless and displaced students must be routed for transit.
- **Vehicle Capacity and Operational Constraints:** The number of students assigned to a seat must never exceed the maximum vehicle capacity of 54 students. Under no circumstances are standees permitted on any active route.
- **Safety Features in Manufacturing:** The state has mandated certain safety enhancement in bus manufacturing prospectively to be adhered to. Buses are subject to DMV inspection multiple times a year.
- **Training: Bus drives and aides undergo** mandatory, state-monitored training. CDL information, physicals and other requirements are provided to the State of New Jersey annually before a statutory deadline. Evacuation and other drills are to be conducted. End-of-route inspection for students is mandatory, among other things.
- **Route Approval:** Requires submittal and approval of routes each year by boards and contracts by County Office.

Please note there is no requirement in code for school bus transportation to be under a certain timeframe, for the bus stop to be within a certain distance from a home, to be on the same side of the street (unless it is a major highway with physical median to cross), or to provide transportation extracurricular events. These aspects are up to district administration and boards to determine locally.

Existing District Best Practices and Operational Guidelines

Beyond legal minimums, the district develops bus routes with the following operational protocols to optimize student safety, manage ride environments, and ensure fiscal responsibility:

- **Target Route Duration:** Routes should be designed so that student travel time does not exceed 45 minutes per one-way trip on paper students. As the district tiers routes, a single vehicle services multiple schools and grades sequentially so efficiency is required to prevent students being late to school upon arrival or late being dismissed.
- **Courtesy Busing and Hazardous Routes:** Non-mandated courtesy busing is provided for students living closer than the statutory limits (less than 2.0 miles) at the district's expense.
- **Geographical Constraints:** Route are designed to minimize or entirely eliminate the necessity for a school bus to back up. Stop placements avoid cul-de-sacs, dead ends, or narrow roadways where multi-point turns are required. Gravel and roads that are privately cleared of snow are reviewed during route development to attempt to avoid. Buses remain on major collector streets and public thoroughfares wherever possible for efficiency and to avoid risks as traffic is mandated to stop per state law for school vehicles. Same side pickup is preferred when feasible. When required, buses do enter areas to circle around to optimize time or return to the school buildings.
- **Seniority & Consistency:** Bus drivers with more experience are provided first opportunity to obtain routes and job duties which enhances safety. When possible, drivers are kept on similar routes to allow for the driver to get to know the students and families which is beneficial in many aspects (i.e. behavioral, etc.). Assigned seats for students are implemented.
- **One AM and One PM Stop:** The district allows for one designated AM stop and one designated PM stop only within township boundaries.
- **Highways:** The district tries to have buses make left turns onto highways at traffic lights to the maximum extent possible due to time it takes for bus to go from a stand-still to regular driving speed.
- **Route Consolidation:** Due to the shortage of bus drivers, routes on 54-passenger vehicles as opposed to lower capacity are preferred and consolidation to extent possible. This allows for less coverage issues when a bus driver calls out with an absence.
- **Parental Waivers:** The district provide transportation waivers to families who do not utilize busing to provide route efficiencies.

“The safest way to transport children to and from school is by school bus. In fact, students are about 70 times more likely to get to school safely when taking a school bus instead of traveling by car.” (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration - NHTSA)

Most school bus-related accidents occur within a 10-foot radius around the bus, where the driver has limited visibility. This area is called the "danger zone." It extends to 30 feet in front of the bus. To avoid accidents, teach your child to use caution when getting on or off the bus and always to stay out of the danger zone.” (New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission - NJMVC)

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