



**REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 17
BOARD OF EDUCATION
MEETING MINUTES
OCTOBER 20, 2026**

A meeting of the Regional School District No. 17 Board of Education was held on October 20, 2026, in the Haddam Killingworth High School Community Room.

Board Member Attendance:

Board Member	Present	Absent	Board Member	Present	Absent
Tara Amatrudo	X		Heather Pach	X	
Sonja Charpentier	X		Matthew Riggs	X	
Lisa Connelly	X		Suzanne Sack	X	
Jennifer Favalora	X		Ben Sodergren	X	
Shawna Goldfarb		X	Jennifer Voegtli	X	
Kelly Haeckel	X				

Also Present: Superintendent of Schools Dr. Patricia Sullivan-Kowalski, Assistant Superintendent Jennifer McCurdy, Director of Finance and Operations Karen Asetta, Director of Student Services Dr. Aaron Puzarne, Director of Technology Chance Davis, Principal David Montemurro, Assistant Principal Heather Persson, Board Administrator Krystal Hanley.

Visitors: approximately 25

Call to Order/Opening of Meeting

Board Chair Heather Pach called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm.

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Sonja Charpentier joined the meeting at 6:32 pm.

Public Comment

Board Chair Pach read a statement on the public comment process and opened the floor to comments.

Eileen Blewett of Killingworth spoke about her concerns regarding unrealized debt from health insurance and asked for further clarity on how money from the education reserve is being spent. She also asked for clarification on the field house floor reimbursement, the services provided by LEARN, and whether the district will perform an internal fraud risk assessment.

Cougar Pride

Superintendent Sullivan-Kowalski introduced Principal David Montemurro and Assistant Principal Heather Persson, who presented on the Cougar Way, a simple, unified, school-wide expectations plan at HK Middle School. They explained the program's philosophy and how it has been implemented, and outlined the expected behaviors and actions associated with the Cougar Way. Students Everett Dudley, Skylar Larson, Haven Mallon, Harrison Redos, Harper Anderson, and Brighton Ford each described the actions they have been taking to show the Cougar Way.

Principal David Montemurro, Assistant Principal Heather Persson, and the Cougar Pride students and parents left the meeting at 6:47 pm.

Report on Challenging Behavior

Director of Student Services Aaron Puzarne gave a report summarizing incidents of challenging behavior that required tiered support during the 25-26 school year.

Presentation on Cornerstone Counseling Partnership

Director Puzarne gave a presentation about the school-based counseling services provided by Cornerstone. He outlined the benefits of a school-based service and discussed reasons for referrals. He explained how the service could help schools address some of the issues brought up in the Youth Voices Matter survey. Superintendent Sullivan-Kowalski said the District is planning on doing a pilot of these services at the Middle School. The District would need to provide one office for the counselors to work from, and services would be available to both middle school and intermediate school students who are enrolled in the insurance-based service. Superintendent Sullivan-Kowalski said that Cornerstone would work with students' other care providers to ensure connected care. Director Puzarne will follow up to determine whether services will be provided through the summer. It was noted that the District must be confident about the quality and consistency of the service, and it was agreed that a pilot scheme would enable us to assess this. As there were no objections from the Board, Superintendent Sullivan-Kowalski and Director Puzarne will move forward with planning the pilot.

Hiring and Retention Update

Assistant Superintendent Jennifer McCurdy gave an update on hiring and retention trends for 2025-26. There were no concerns about certified retention rates. The District will seek to improve retention rates among classified and central office staff. In terms of certified teachers, it was noted that on average, new hires came in three steps lower than the staff they replaced, as many were early-career educators, but highly qualified.

Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Sullivan-Kowalski said that the District has paid Arcadis \$137,864 so far for fiscal years 2025, 2026, and 2027.

She reported that payment for the White Barn demolition was not closed out yet, but she will provide an update on this at the November BOE meeting.

Personnel and Evaluation Subcommittee Report

Sonja Charpentier said the committee discussed the Final Staffing and Budget Policies memo at its meeting, and it will also be discussed further at tonight's BOE meeting. She also said they reviewed the Superintendent's goals, which will also be discussed later in tonight's meeting.

Finance and Facilities Subcommittee Report

Kelly Haeckel said the committee looked ahead at the fiscal year and passed a motion to recommend a budget transfer to the Board to fund the salary for the 'Director of Facilities, Safety and Security, and Transportation' position. They discussed the non-operating fund balance, and there were no concerns about spending so far. Director Asetta noted that it was expected that HK Cubs would come close to zero, and noted that participation in the free breakfast program has been strong. Superintendent Sullivan-Kowalski said that a review of the food services spending will be a topic at the January BOE Workshop. The committee also discussed the FY25 Audit results and noted that an update on progress towards achieving the auditors' recommendations will be a standing item on the committee's agenda. Superintendent Sullivan-Kowalski confirmed that the District's partnership with LEARN will terminate at the end of June 2027 and that she will work with LEARN's directors to transition to the new staffing structure.

Ms. Haeckel said the committee discussed the capital plan, but they are waiting for the new Director of Facilities, Safety and Security, and Transportation to provide analysis and input before moving forward. He will be joining the District on November 9th. Superintendent Sullivan-Kowalski said she hopes to have data from the bus route study soon, and this information will feed into the capital plan.

Curriculum Subcommittee Report

Jennifer Voegtli said that Curriculum Coordinator Heather Rigatti gave a presentation on screen time and device use and made recommendations on the District's guidelines on device use. Assistant Superintendent McCurdy said she will look into how to share these guidelines with parents and through the RSD17 website.

The Committee also discussed the 2027-28 School Calendar. An early release day has been added back into the Calendar for September based on feedback from administrators. This will be a Professional Development day.

ADM - Towns of Haddam and Killingworth

Superintendent Sullivan-Kowalski presented the Average Daily Membership data for the Towns of Haddam and Killingworth as of October 1, 2026, that will be reported to the State Department of Education. The total number of students reported was 1639, with 983 (59.98%) in Haddam and 656 (40.02%) in Killingworth. By comparison, last year's percentages were 59.74% from Haddam and 40.26% from Killingworth.

Fiscal Quarterly Report

Director Asetta summarized her report. She said she did not expect the salary lines to be over budget, but the Health Insurance spending may be tight due to recent new hires. The tuition line is currently positive. The transportation line is also positive due to changes made in special education transportation. She reported that, overall, the District is currently in a good position.

P&E Staffing Memo

Superintendent Sullivan-Kowalski provided background on the memo's development and explained that the Personnel and Evaluations committee has been reviewing items specific to P&E in recent months. The goal is to create a staffing handbook and to put certain staffing practices into policy. P&E will be working to provide the policy committee with recommendations for next steps. Superintendent Sullivan-Kowalski will identify which subcommittees will review the remainder of the Staffing memo.

Budget Transfers

Kelly Haeckel **MOVED** and Jennifer Voegtli **SECONDED** a motion to approve a budget transfer as follows:

Account	Description	Debit (increase)	Credit (reduce)
01.02540.112.606.000.5	Maintenance Salary, Region	37,000	
01.02540.430.102.000.5	Bldgs & Grounds, Repair/Maint - KES		8,000
01.02540.430.104.000.5	Bldgs & Grounds, Repair/Maint - BES		6,500
01.02540.430.203.000.5	Bldgs & Grounds, Repair/Maint - HKMS		5,000
01.02540.430.205.000.5	Bldgs & Grounds, Repair/Maint - HKHS		13,000
01.02540.430.205.033.5	Purch Service, Facilities/Athletic, HKHS		4,500

Motion passed 10-0-0 by a show of hands.

Consent Agenda

- a. Enrollment Report
- b. Personnel Report
- c. Acceptance of a donation of \$2,000 from the KES PTO to be deposited into the KES Student Activity Fund. These funds will be divided equally by grades K - 3 (\$500 each) and used to offset the cost of Field Trips and student events.
- d. Acceptance of a donation of \$3,000 from the HKIMS PTO to be deposited into the HKMS Student Activity Fund. These funds will be divided equally by grade (\$1,000 each) and used to offset the cost of Field Trips and student events.
- e. Acceptance of a donation of \$2,000 from the HKIMS PTO to be deposited into the HKIS Student Activity Fund. These funds will be divided equally by grade (\$1,000 each) and used to offset the cost of Field Trips and student events.
- f. 2027 BOE Meeting Calendar First Read
- g. 2027 BOE Subcommittee Calendar First Read
- h. Inventory Disposal Request - HKMS
- i. Inventory Disposal Request - Furniture Sale
- j. Approval of Minutes from September 15th, 2026, BoE Meeting
- k. Approval of Minutes from October 13th, 2026, special meeting regarding personnel matter.
- l. Approval of Minutes from October 13th, 2026, special meeting regarding FY25 Financial Audit.

m. Inventory Disposal Request - BES Library books

Sonja Charpentier **MOVED** and Lisa Connelly **SECONDED** a motion to approve the Consent Agenda as presented to the Board, less items f, j and l.

Motion passed 10-0-0 by a show of hands.

The members discussed item f - 2027 BOE Meeting Calendar. It was noted that all meetings were scheduled in Haddam, except for the joint budget meetings. Some members noted that holding some meetings in Killingworth creates a more equitable experience for both BOE members and community members. Superintendent Sullivan-Kowalski noted that holding meetings at HKIMS presents some logistical and technical challenges and can be disruptive, especially during the busy budget season. However, she agreed to review the calendar to see which meetings can be moved to Killingworth. The revised calendar will be presented at the next BOE meeting on November 17th.

The members discussed item j - approval of Minutes from September 15th, 2026, BoE Meeting. It was noted that the paragraph on the last page, under Announcements and Comments, did not accurately reflect the conversation that took place.

Kelly Haeckel **MOVED** and Jennifer Voetgli **SECONDED** a motion to replace the paragraph on the last page, under Announcements and Comments with the following:

“At the time, the Superintendent said that there was a draft of the audit and that the auditor was willing to meet with us regarding the draft, and as soon as they finalized it, they would upload it to the State (even if the Board had not seen it). We discussed whether to review it pre-referendum or post, and whether to see it in draft or final form. We came to the consensus that timing to the referendum or discussing its impact on the referendum was irrelevant, but rather we should proceed with the Board business (as this is a priority) to review it as soon as practical (not go through Finance and Facilities) to understand its implications and make it public.”

Motion passed 10-0-0 by a show of hands.

Superintendent Sullivan-Kowalski noted that, after the September 15th meeting, the auditors said they would not upload the audit report to the State until they had presented their findings to the BOE.

The Board discussed item l - Approval of Minutes from October 13th, 2026, special meeting regarding FY25 Financial Audit. They discussed the wording of the motion regarding the written action and improvement plan to address priorities identified through the FY25 audit process.

Jennifer Voetgli **MOVED** and Tara Amatrudo **SECONDED** a motion to revise the wording of this motion to reflect the wording from the transcript of the recorded meeting, as follows:

“The superintendent will write a letter to the Board of Education stating what you are going to do to make sure that the elements of this plan come together with an end result of being a success by June 30th of:

- all the procedures are in place;
- that we have transitions plans from LEARN to new personnel;
- oversight of systems and controls;
- reporting to the board weekly and monthly of how we are progressing;

- that we have our spending forecast and reporting;
- that we reclassify our assets appropriately;
- that we are meeting with a rating agency to determine any impact related to our audit;
- that we have a centralized document system in place;
- that we have investment policies and other policies that are needed;
- That we put our bank accounts in correct custodial
- That we facilitate a fraud audit if we think that is the right thing to do;
- And that we have timely financial reporting

We hear from the superintendent how you are going to make sure that this plan affects the change that we want.”

Motion passed 8-1-1 by a show of hands.

The members discussed the motion's intent and agreed to propose a new motion based on the originally published wording in the minutes of the October 13, 2026, meeting, with some revisions.

Suzanne Sack **MOVED** and Tara Amatrudo **SECONDED** a motion that the Board of Education direct the Superintendent to submit a written action and improvement plan, including specific actions, timelines, and milestones, with the goal of achieving a timely, unmodified financial audit with any material weaknesses significantly mitigated, by June 30, 2027, or earlier. The plan shall address the priorities identified through the audit process (including, but not limited to):

The transition from outsourcing to internal hiring and onboarding of a complete fiscal office staff (including the Director), and

The accounting control processes and supervision identified in the audit are documented and adopted, and

The Accounting procedures manual, including role clarity and division of duties, and

The IT policies, processes, and procedures, and

The Journal entry controls, support documentation, and supervision, and

The Implementation of asset reclassification, and

The Centralized documentation system, and

The Investment and custody policies and implementation, and

The Financial reporting, forecasting, and year-end fund balance management (including timeliness), and

The Reconciliation of employee census data for accurate OPEB liability, and

The Investment policies related to custodial assets and the reclassification of assets.

She will also seek guidance and inform the Board on how audit outcomes and remediation actions may impact and/or improve the bond rating and develop a short and long-term plan for conducting fraud risk assessments across the various district departments.

The plan shall also establish a schedule for regular progress reports to the Finance and Facilities Committee and Board of Education, documenting completed actions, outstanding milestones, implementation challenges, and any necessary adjustments to ensure timely completion of the audit and sustained improvement in the district's financial management practices

Motion passed 10-0-0 by a show of hands.

LEARN

Jennifer Favalora said the LEARN director recently attended a meeting in Washington DC and reported that the E-Rate program may be getting sunsetted. Ms. Favalora also noted that the LEARN Building Committee has recently been seeing a delay in the approval of state reimbursement applications.

HKYFS

Board Chair Pach reported that the Trunk or Treat event held on October 17th was a huge success. She noted that the Job Bank project is underway and is helping to increase opportunities for meaningful community service. She noted that the programs and activities to provide tiered support to students are going well. Upcoming activities include the Pumpkin Run on October 25 and a drug take-back day on October 24th. Further information on events and support can be found on the HKYFS website.

Haddam Killingworth Recreation Department

There was no report.

Haddam Board of Selectmen

There was no report.

Killingworth Board of Selectmen

There was no report.

Jennifer Voegtli **MOVED** and Kelly Haeckel **SECONDED** a motion to enter executive session to discuss items 8, 9 and 10 on the agenda, inviting Superintendent Sullivan-Kowalski, Assistant Superintendent McCurdy and Director Asetta to join for items 8 and 9, and Superintendent Sullivan-Kowalski to join for item 10.

Motion passed 10-0-0 by a show of hands.

Director Puzarne, Director Davis, Krystal Hanley and all remaining visitors left the meeting at 9:04 pm.

The meeting entered executive session at 9:10 pm.

Karen Asetta left the meeting at 9:36 pm.

Jennifer McCurdy left the meeting at 9:45 pm.

The meeting left executive session at 10:34 pm.

Tara Amatrudo **MOVED** and Lisa Connelly **SECONDED** a motion to approve the superintendent's goals as presented.

The motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.

Announcements and Comments

There were no announcements and comments.

The meeting adjourned at 10:36pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Krystal Hanley
Board Administrator

Approval: _____ Date: _____
Sonja Charpentier, Board Secretary