



HUDSON SCHOOL DISTRICT ♦ Hudson, New Hampshire
Hills Memorial Library, 18 Library Street

6:30 pm

Regular Meeting
Non-Public Session

Hudson School Board Meeting Minutes October 18, 2021

In attendance:

Board Members

Gary Gasdia, Chairman
Diana LaMothe, Vice-chair
Ethan Beals
Mike Campbell
Gretchen Whiting

SAU Staff

Larry Russell, Superintendent of Schools
Rachel Borge, Director Special Services
Jen Burk, Business Administrator
Kim Organek, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum & Instruction

A. Call to Order [0:00:08]

1. Pledge of Allegiance

Mr. Gasdia called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm. The Pledge of Allegiance was said.

B. Public Input [0:00:45]

Ms. LaMothe read the policy for public input.

The Board received online comments regarding COVID-19 protocol (mask mandating) and gym usage. There was a late request from Jim Weaver who wanted to speak about allowing the non-Rec basketball program in the schools this year.

Ms. LaMothe made a motion to allow public input regarding the use of gymnasiums by the Hudson Recreation Department. Ms. Whiting seconded the motion. Motion passed 5:0.

Jim Weaver of 27 Rolling Woods Drive spoke about allowing The Hudson Rec Dept. to use the school gym for rec basketball during the week and weekend. Travel basketball would be held at the Community Center. Around 500 students participated in Rec Basketball. It took about 4 weeks to get the program running. The Rec director, Supt. Russell, and the head of the EOC met and the EOC head was supportive about moving basketball forward. There was concern with students missing out on another year of basketball or having a shortened schedule.

Suzanne Dozois of 25 Saint Anthony Drive asked if the decision was up to Supt. Russell vs. the Board. She inquired about updating the agenda to include bulleted items for public input/discussion/Superintendent Report. She noted that there was a craft fair being held by the Women's Club in Hudson at the middle school. Mr. Gasdia replied that the agenda suggestion would be reviewed and that the decision about the use of the gym was an operational one (items regarding the Hills House field involved the Board). The craft fair was not approved. If Board members wanted to add items to the agenda during the meeting, a vote was necessary. It was clarified that having public input before going into non-public session had been done but rarely. It was noted that minutes were not on the website but this was not on tonight's agenda.

C. Good News Update (Information)

Ms. Organek noted that this summer, the Greater Hudson Chamber of Commerce held a Love our Community scavenger hunt. The Paige family won a ride to school in a fire truck. Nottingham West held its annual 5th grade breakfast. Video was shown of the pep rally and balloon bull created by new Alvirne Spanish teacher Michelle Tieman, an award-winning balloon artist. The Russian Language/Russian American History classes held a Russian lunch today.

D. Old Business [00:11:58]

1. Washington, DC Trip (decision)

Approval was asked of the Board to hold the eighth grade Washington, DC trip in May and either have a mandate for parents to pay for cancel-for-any-reason insurance (75% refundable) or be able to waive it. There was review of the trip's itinerary, including Colonial Williamsburg and Jamestown. There was concern about the risk to families not taking the insurance if families who did take insurance opted out of the trip. This depended on the timeframe of cancellations. The cost was \$1,019 which was more than last year. Normally, the trip cost was kept lower and included going to food courts; this year's trip would include food court meals at lunch and sit-down meals at dinner which increased the trip cost a bit. A cookie dough fundraiser was typically held for this trip. Because much of the money was not sent out for the trip last year, families received full reimbursements. Mr. Gasdia favored having the waiver as security in case the trip could not be held in May (e.g. if the Board deemed it risky). Mr. Beals disagreed, feeling that the waiver should have a clause about the possibility of the district canceling the trip.

Ms. LaMothe made a motion to approve the Washington, DC trip and require parents to purchase the CFAR (cancel-for-any-reason) insurance. Ms. Whiting seconded the motion. Motion passed 4:1 with Mr. Beals voting nay.

Mr. Beals made a motion to add discussion with Superintendent Russell about Hudson Recreation Basketball using the gym and any other requests that might have been tabled to this point. Ms. Whiting seconded the motion. Motion passed 5:0.

Mr. Beals supported the Hudson Recreation basketball program to run and have access to the gym. Mr. Russell had met with the Head of EOC, Business Administrator and the Hudson Rec. Director; it was felt that numbers were too high to start now (with cleaning/setup also). Basketball was important in Hudson. Perhaps the second part of the season would work. Metrics such as the number of hospitalizations were being looked at, noting that things seemed to be moving in a positive trend. Craft fair donations were going towards scholarship so it was a direct benefit to students. The Rec. Department could start preparing for basketball, with the possibility that things could turn. However, there were now vaccinations, medications, and better strategies available. There was discussion about looking at each building use request individually. Plans could be shared e.g. how many parents were allowed at games, starting Rec. Basketball after Christmas break, etc. Superintendents were trying to keep situations as safe as possible. Agreements needed to be made with organizations that COVID protocols needed to be followed and clarifying that the risk was shared, not just from the School Board.

E. New Business [0:46:45]

1. Donation Acceptance

There was an anonymous donation of \$2500 to the middle school to be used for the purpose of purchasing shoes for students at the discretion of Principal Bowen.

Ms. LaMothe made a motion to approve the anonymous donation of \$2,500 to the middle school for the purchase of shoes for students in need. Mr. Beals seconded the motion. Motion passed 5:0.

2. FY23 Budget: Introduction, Special Services, Facilities, Technology

An overview of the FY23 budget included:

- Efforts to improve the educational support for any learning losses due to the pandemic
- Targeted resources requested from the administration for technology, capital projects, furniture, building improvements and curriculum initiatives.

Main cost drivers included:

- Personnel costs (between 82-85% fluctuation) including benefits and salaries
- Technology
- Capital and facility improvements
- 5 district collective bargaining groups: HFT (teachers); Teamsters (custodians); AFSCME (Administrators); Secretaries Union; and PSRP (part-time paraprofessionals and food service staff)
- HFT and Teamsters contracts are part of this budget's collective bargaining agreements (expiring at the end of 2023); the other three CBAs were in negotiations (Warrant Articles)
- Changes in staff/turnover
- Cost increases for benefits: budgeting for 8% increase in health insurance and 5% in dental insurance; the actual rate was due from SchoolCare around mid-November.
- Staffing requests mostly in elementary grades, at Alvirne and CTE due to changes in student population and the CTE programming (keep students in-district)
- NHRS cost increase was in FY22
- Technology: improvement and access of computer hardware, software and infrastructure to align with 21st century learning and the strategic plan, including 1:1 devices, etc.

- Capital and Facility Improvements: including updates for HMS girls' locker rooms and purchasing replacement furniture; Capital Improvement projects
- Enrollments with appropriate levels of staffing
- There were 3060 students last year and there was now 3086 students. A decrease in enrollment was anticipated for FY23 (3,056).
- Warrant Articles: CBAs for AFSCME, Secretaries, and PSRPs; roof replacement for Nottingham West Elementary School; Capital Reserve Renovation Fund; land transfer to the Lions Club for Lions Field; and update the fund balance retention to reflect the law from late 2020.

Ms. LaMothe suggested separating grade 1 from the elementary enrollment numbers based on the way students were dispersed in the district. It was noted that this was the second year of full-time kindergarten and that drove the first-grade number. Enrollment would most likely increase as the pandemic dwindled. She also requested adding tax impact information.

There was a review of the budget books. Sections were available on the website as well.

Special Services FY23 Budget Overview:

Highlights of the 7.95% (\$1,004,190) increase over FY22 budget:

- Increase in number of students requiring out of district programs
- Increase in specialized needs (in and out of district)
- Increase in cost for students returning from remote learning (e.g. early intervention services for students under 3 years old)
- State authorized 5% annual increase in out-of-district tuition rates
- Improved instructional practices and materials
- Evaluation/selection of budgeted items to meet all obligations and be fiscally responsible to the community
- Included \$688,318 change in salaries and benefits due to: new employee physical therapist (vs. contracted service); three counselors dedicated to emotional/behavioral disorder programs funded through federal funds (no tax impact); reallocated funds drawing down charter school resources to hire a teacher (needed to fund out of the general fund to help with cost-sharing with another district if necessary); a contracted service provider moved out of state and the position was replaced with an employee

Changes over \$5,000 included: salary and benefit changes, professional services, charter school services decrease, tuition, software - CARES, and transportation.

The pilot transition program was just underway (to launch next semester) and was budgeted flat with a conservative increase of 5% as it was an out-of-district provider.

There was discussion about the 34 vacant special services positions. Today, the high school was short by 8 paraprofessionals, 4 at the middle school, and an anticipated long-term substitute at the elementary level. Difficulty filling these positions was not unique to Hudson but it was obligated to provide services. Ms. Borge would review the possibility of contracting out for paraprofessionals. It was possible to attract more if full-time positions were offered. Speech and language professionals were difficult to find also; a telehealth provider was being

used to account for necessary service provision. Considering the number of vacancies, there was concern about tying up money that might never be used. It was suggested to do a bottom-line adjustment (for positions that would not be filled full-year.) Mr. Gasdia felt there was over \$100,000 that could be earmarked elsewhere. Ms. Borge understood the logic but noted that the district was still obligated to provide services. Currently, 12 positions were unfilled (primarily at the high school). Twenty-one students were projected to go out-of-district next year; it was noted that sometimes these situations were court-ordered and the district had to pay. It was not feasible to pull students together in-house due to range of age, etc. Sending-school districts provided/paid for students with special services at charter schools. Ms. Borge could get the number of students with IEPs who were provided services at charter schools. Because services were necessary, it was difficult to think of a budget cut. An extra \$20,000 would go towards transition services (for students up to age 21 to enter into the workforce and be productive citizens).

Mr. Gasdia suggested decreasing 7 paraprofessionals to \$1 and taking \$20,000 of the savings to be used towards transition services. Mr. Beals suggested 12 paras. There was concern about the risk of need to fill the positions and the obligations - e.g. if positions were filled but they were earmarked at \$1; this would mean deficit appropriation and money would need to be found elsewhere e.g. reserve fund, etc.

[1:32:28]

Mr. Gasdia made a motion to take 7 of the paraprofessionals earmarked at \$17,186 and decrease them to \$1.00 for a savings of \$123,002 and take \$20,000 of that and put towards transition services leaving a net of \$100,000. Ms. Whiting seconded the motion. Motion passed 5:0.

Mr. Beals made a motion to decrease by another 3 paraprofessionals (10 total) for, \$17,186 to \$1.00 for a savings of \$51,555. Mr. Gasdia seconded the motion. Motion passed 5:0.

Facilities FY23 Budget [1:45:16]

Highlights included:

- No vacant positions/have not lost employees
- Budget decrease of 5.9%, including elimination of funds from the Warrant Article for the two roof replacements
- Budget additions included: exhaust fan replacements at LSS, girls' locker room renovation/gym curtain replacement at HMS, gym door replacements at AHS, air handler replacements at NWS/HGS and IT data closet installations at SAU and AHS
- Third phase of window replacement at HMS
- Continuation of outsourced landscaping and HVAC preventive maintenance program
- Similar utilities analysis summary
- Changes over \$5,000 included: custodial supplies based upon usage and assumed increases; general repairs; snow removal; painting; utilities for natural gas and electric for each building and repair and maintenance contracts due to CTE side (preventative maintenance contract for that equipment).

Discussion included: square footage increase (addition of CTE) and cost (including Hills Garrison portables); Capital needs overview list done in 2019 - working on an updated version of repairs/maintenance looking out 20 years; HMS - gym curtain was old and had issues; girls locker room quote was accurate; Alvirne door replacement was actual quote and definite safety need; and landscaping contract - in third year of a 5-year contract vs. adding a groundskeeping position (the contracted crew was more efficient especially before school began in the fall).

General repairs projects would be the only area where cuts could be made if necessary. IT and Maintenance were working with camera installation at schools. There was no grant funding for a second playground for HO Smith so that would need to have a Warrant Article. Grants such as ESSER funds were looked into for things like HVAC in relation to COVID and it was determined that, by the time of grant application, expense would increase (e.g. wearing down motors faster by using newer air filters).

[2:08:15]

Technology FY23 Budget Review - IT Director Kevin Peterson

Highlights included:

- Increase of 3.19% (\$56,799)
- Increase of devices in the past year (include 1:1 devices, etc.)

New:

- Expanded support of 1:1 student computers into grades 6-12
- Laptops for teachers and staff
- Additional staff member to support devices
- Replacement/expansion of older network equipment for increased enrollment at HO Smith

Ongoing:

- Continuing to repair/replace existing classroom technology such as classroom computers and projectors and infrastructure such as wireless network and firewall
- Continuing support of new district-wide initiatives with technology (Schoology, i-Ready)

3.19% Increase included:

- 2.36% increase in salaries and benefits
- 0.39% increase in office expense
- 4.91% increase in contracted services
- 12.57% increase in educational resources
- decrease of 0.26% in equipment

Vacant positions should be able to be filled as the district was working well with colleges such as SNHU (summer intern stayed into the fall). With new devices being brought in, and there were increases in help desk questions. Zoom software was free except for recording meetings. The Schoology contract was in year one of three (first year paid by ESSER funds).

The software licensing cost increased based on history and because districts were getting federal funds.

Google was the last LMS. There was discussion about teacher requests for classroom management software and its usefulness to manage full instruction to students while they were on devices. There was concern about the \$10,000 cost taking away instruction by watching students on devices. The possibility of a pilot was discussed.

Mr. Beals made a motion to cut \$10,000 from line 10002840-650 for #18. Ms. Whiting seconded the motion. Motion passed 4:1 with Ms. LaMothe voting nay.

Regarding the additional staff member to support devices, an experienced tech person left the district and the replacement was not as expensive. There was benefit to having a technician at each school, being proactive and cross-training employees. Mr. Beals felt the need was not there for the additional position; he preferred seeing what it would be like with a fully staffed IT Department first. The importance of tech help was discussed. Currently, 30 help tickets are being done daily with 4 staff members. There would be 8 total positions including the additional staff member. The idea of having a part-time position to work on devices was discussed.

Mr. Beals made a motion to remove line item 6 on page 11 (in the total of \$52,073). Mr. Gasdia seconded the motion. Motion failed 1:4 with Mr. Beals voting yea.

Mr. Beals suggested seeing a program partnering with schools to land strong full-time personnel and a program where high school students could provide some simple technological help. There was a possibility to provide Comp TIA certifications to help students get on the path to help desk certification right after high school.

Ms. Whiting suggested providing a quarterly technology update (number of helpdesk tickets, etc.) There was a review in April based on the strategic plan.

F. Recommended Action [2:55:10]

1. Manifests - Make necessary corrections and sign

G. Committee Reports [2:55:34]

Ms. LaMothe spoke about the October 6th Budget Committee meeting. Jen Burk, Terry Wolf, and Kim Organek presented. A question came up regarding using the Town's unassigned funds for school emergencies.

Mr. Campbell reported that the Cost Savings Committee met and planned early goals.

H. Reports to the Board (Information) [2:57:43]

1. Superintendent Report

Today, there were 180 State (COVID-related) hospitalizations. Hudson cases were holding strong. At the high school, there were 5 new cases this week (25 cumulative); there was one cumulative case in the other schools collectively. There was a meeting with citizens last Wednesday regarding mask-wearing. Adjustments could be made to reflect the current situation. Four new free COVID testing sites were open and results were being returned more

quickly. Teachers seem to like the status quo now for the most part, though changing the (mask-wearing) status was uneasy. Thoughts were split between elementary and secondary staff. It was suggested that behavior reports could begin anew. On another note, Ms. LaMothe asked for updates on behavior and discipline matters, if monthly reports could begin again on a regular basis.

2. Assistant Superintendent Report

Ms. Organek noted that Stephanie LaFreniere was hired as the new HMS assistant principal. For National Hispanic Heritage month, there were activities, discussions, and a trivia contest. Unity would be held on October 20th where people wore orange to prevent bullying. Red Ribbon Week (National drug use prevention campaign) would be held between October 23rd - 28th. On October 28th at HMS, the PTO would host a pumpkin carving and scarecrow contest. The play *Clue* would be presented on November 19th and 20th at Alvirne.

3. Director of Special Services Report

Ms. Borge spoke about challenges such as delays in social skill development due to the pandemic. Teachers were relearning and adjusting approaches every day. She commended paraprofessionals for their support of students and teachers. On Friday, there was a presentation by Dr. Heidi Curry of the Reading League about 50 years worth of research and reading that could help the district.

4. Business Administrator Report

Ms. Burk spoke about the requests for snowplowing contract protections: written correction period for deficiencies; withholding 10% of contract payments until successful completion of work; and cancellation with 30 days written notice if not meeting district requirements.

I. Board Member Comments [3:09:54]

Ms. Roy said that the Town was in budget presentations. Some Town employees put together a cookbook called *The Taste of Hudson* for \$10; people could contact Jill Laughlin at Town Hall to purchase one.

Mr. Campbell noted that the Early Learning Centers PTO's fall book fair was today and would last until the end of the month. Proceeds went to the PTO to fund activities. He spoke with neighborhood children that the day after Halloween should be a day off from school.

Ms. Whiting reminded that October 22 and 23 Haunted Hayride will be put on by the high school.

Mr. Beals commended Ms. Burk on the budget process (binders) and he hoped any cuts were not taken personally by departments; he was not taking budget cuts lightly.

Ms. LaMothe hoped to see good participation at the Budget Public Hearing on January 13, 2022. Deliberative sessions were in February and voting was on March 8, 2022. Two School Board seats would be open. She offered to provide information to anyone interested in running.

Mr. Gasdia thanked everyone for presenting budget information tonight. Despite struggles, a lot of good things were being done in the district.

J. Non-Public Session [3:16:02]

At 9:45pm, Mike Campbell made a motion to enter into non-public session per RSA 91-A:3 II (c). Gretchen Whiting seconded the motion. Motion passed 5:0 by rollcall vote.

At the end of the public session, all SAU staff except Superintendent Larry Russell left the meeting. At 10:02 pm, the School Board members discussed a personnel matter.

Ms. LaMothe made a motion to mutually agree to end the contract with Superintendent Larry Russell effective June 30, 2022, second by Ms. Whiting. Motion passed 5-0.

Once a letter that documents the mutual agreement is signed by Superintendent Russell and Chairman Gasdia, an announcement may be made to the School District and public. The Board will also determine the process to search for a superintendent. Timing is of the essence. The current Board would need to complete the search by February 4, 2022 and the new Superintendent would be voted on in the February 7, 2022 School Board Meeting.

A motion to seal these minutes for three weeks was made by Mr. Beals, second by Ms. Whiting. Motion passed 5-0.

A motion to exit non-public and adjourn at 10:34 pm was made by Mr. Beals, second by Ms. Whiting. The motion passed 5-0.

Respectfully submitted by
Susan DeFelice (public)
Diana LaMothe (non-public)