

NORTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Norton, Massachusetts

NORTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE
JOINT MEETING WITH FINANCE COMMITTEE
MINUTES OF MEETING

Date of Joint Meeting: Thursday, September 28, 2023

Location: High School Library

Present: Committee Members: Vice Chairperson Mr. Deniz Savas, Mr. Nick Schleicher, Mrs. Justine Callanan, and Mr. Dan Sheedy ***Not present:*** Chairperson Mrs. Sheri Cohen ***Also present:*** Superintendent of Schools Jennifer O'Neill, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning Brian Ackerman, and School Business Administrator Kristine Hadfield.

Finance Committee opened meeting at 7:01 p.m., with roll call of attendance:

Paula Daniel, Frank Joe Parker, Tracy Mahan, Bonnie Yezukevich, Stephen Evans, Cody Thompson, Zack Tsilis, Kevin Bugaj, Sandra Ollerhead, Paul Schleicher

The Finance Committee and School Committee discussed topics relating to the FY'24 Budget.

Topics discussed:

Mrs. Hadfield provided the Committees with a Budget Line-Item Report with expenditures and encumbrances to date.

Mrs. Hadfield provided the Committees with documentation regarding Revolving and Grant Funds as of September 2023. The Committees discussed entitlement grants received and grants that will not be continuing, such as the ESSER III Grant which will be a loss of approximately \$500,000 and how this will affect the budget.

The Finance Committee inquired about budget cuts last year to the music and foreign language departments. The effect of staff changes allowed the priority of keeping the Middle School Band and music programs in the district. The staff changes allowed a backfill for positions with a lower salary employee. Also, if personnel had requested a one-year leave of absence, a substitute would be hired for the one-year position. Keep in mind, personnel could resume their duties after their one year leave of absence at their current salary. Personnel are contracted to notify administration by March of their intentions.

Mrs. Hadfield provided the Committee with an FY'24 Out of District Tuitions and Transportation Expenses chart. The Committees reviewed the chart and discussed the potential increase of \$728,315.00 for unexpected SPED expenses for tuition and transportation. It was noted, circumstances are subject to change at any time with no relief from the State. The school keeps a reserve SPED funding of approximately \$175,000 for unexpected expenses, but at this time that will not be enough. The Circuit Breaker Grant provides 60-80% of funds over and above the \$40,000 that the school is responsible for. Revenue from this grant is distributed

quarterly. Therefore, the school was able to carry over \$670,000 from last year. But at this time, calculations predict there will be not be as many funds to carry over into FY'25.

The Finance Committee addressed the issue of how and who makes the decision to send a student out of district. Mr. Cerce and Ms. Russo explained to the Committee there is an IEP team consisting of parents and educators that utilizes data. Transportation for a student is first tried through H&L Bloom, but when they cannot transport, a bid goes out to private vendors. If a student is on an IEP, we are legally bound to provide services. Some special education costs are not something we can always control. They pointed out that younger students who did not receive services at an early age due to COVID are now requiring a great deal, which requires more staff. It is important and necessary to have early intervention. There are about 568 students receiving services. The school has developed 32 programs in classrooms to accommodate the different needs of the students. This has space in the school buildings at full capacity even though there may be a decrease in enrollment. Each case is individualized, but the goal is to try to bring students back if placed out of district and provide services in the neighborhood school, but that requires well trained staff. The Finance Committee commented this information is critical and now have a better understanding of the SPED expenses.

The Committees discussed if medical insurance is available to offset costs of SPED. Most of those funds go to the out of district collaborative or private institutes. It was noted that insurance does not cover any school requirements such as 1:1 staff or nurse support. The school tries to cost share with other programs such as DMH, DCYF and DSS. Some funds are received from Medicaid which goes to the Town general fund.

This led to the discussion if general education funds are cut to support SPED, what effects does this have on students leaving NPS for vocational and private schools, and the school choice student enrollment and funds. The Committees want students to come to Norton and if our general education is not comparable, we could start seeing a decline in enrollment. The impact of losing School Choice funds was discussed by the Committees. On Oct 1st, the school prepares the enrollment report for the State and will share the enrollment with the Finance Committee.

The Extended Stay has four students enrolling at this time. Dr. O'Neill has meet with the Town Migrant Task Force and funds of \$1,000 for each student will be granted for any immediate need of the student, and \$104 per student/per day will be granted. If the student is enrolled for the full year, that is a potential of approximately \$18,000 per student. It was determined that fixed costs will remain in place, and the pros and cons regarding class sizes and layoffs were discussed if the schools receive or don't receive the potential funds. Dr. O'Neill invited the Finance Committee to come and walk the buildings and view classrooms.

The Finance Committee addressed if there were any potential capital projects for the school buildings. Mr. Lizotte informed the Committee the roofs at the LGN and HAY will need to be addressed. The school will utilize MSBA. The 5-year capital plan has been submitted to the Finance Committee and priority is with a new fire protection panel at the Middle School and security access control systems at exterior doors. The Finance Committee advised they will be voting on capital plans next week.

The Finance Committee inquired about fees collected from the Athletic Campus. Mr. Lizotte advised the Committee approximately \$70,000 has been collected from outside programs. The

school does not charge our local youth groups. The funds are deposited into the Facility Revolving Account.

Mrs. Hadfield provided a memorandum regarding transferring funds, effective June 2023. This transfer request is standard at end of year to balance out the books. Transfers are not generally required but may occur for extenuating circumstances. The Finance Committee would like to be advised if those transfers do occur.

The Finance Committee acknowledged the prediction of a \$1.3M - \$1.4M deficit before any increases are budgeted. The next joint meeting is scheduled for Nov. 13th and the Committee inquired if the next budget figures could be presented at that meeting. The school discussed concerns and situations that need to be considered to determine a budget, and at this time it is too soon to prepare the budget. The Committee expressed the desire to be internally informed and included regarding the potential budget earlier in the cycle than previously submitted.

The Finance Committee was concerned how the impact of teacher resignations and layoffs affected the school. Dr. O'Neill advised the Committee that there were 25 resignations and approximately 10 of those positions were not filled. The Committees discussed how this affects class sizes, programs, electives, etc., that may lead students to choose other school districts.

The Finance Committee inquired about obtaining a staff member explicitly for grant writing. Dr. O'Neill advised the Committee the school worked with a vendor last year and that was not a good fit. Mr. Ackerman advised the Committees he is diligently on the DESE website reviewing grants.

The School Committee thanked everyone who came out for the meeting.

Adjourn: The Finance Committee adjourned the meeting at 9:08 p.m.

Documents and Other Exhibits Used at Meeting:

- Revolving and Grant Funds YTD, September 2023
- FY'24 Out of District Tuitions and Transportation Expenses
- FY'24 Budget Line Item with YTD Expenses and Encumbrances
- Memorandum regarding Adjusting Journal Entries – FY'23


Respectfully Submitted,
Jennifer O'Neill, Ed.D.
Secretary Pro Tem

Sheri Cohen, Chairperson

Deniz Savas, Vice-Chairman



Nick Schleicher



Dan Sheedy



Justine Callanan

dmk