

Seymour Board of Education  
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES

January 25, 2021

Zoom

7:00 pm

COPY RECEIVED  
DATE: 1/28/2021  
TIME: 12:00 pm  
TOWN CLERK'S OFFICE

**BOARD MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:**

Kristen Bruno  
Christopher Champagne  
James Garofolo  
Kristen Harmeling  
Jay Hatfield  
Peter Kubik (7:07 pm)  
Beth Nesteriak (7:30 pm)  
Fred Stanek  
Ed Strumello

**OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE:**

Michael Wilson, Superintendent of Schools  
Vonda Tencza, Associate Superintendent  
Sherry Holmes, Business Manager  
Kris Boyle, Director of Special Services  
Lee-Ann Dauerty, Board Clerk  
Rob Dyer, System Technology Coordinator  
Derrick Martin, Technology  
Jim Freund, Principal, SHS  
Paul Lucke, Assistant Principal, SHS  
Ernie DiStasi, Assistant Principal, SHS  
Jodie Roden, Principal, SMS  
Kathleen Freimuth, Assistant Principal, SMS  
Mary Sue Feige, Principal, BS  
Lauren Reid, Assistant Principal, BS  
David Olechna, Principal, CLS  
Stacey Albertson, Assistant Principal, CLS  
Annemarie Drugonis, First Selectwoman

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

A. Pledge of Allegiance

Mr. Strumello called the meeting to order with the Pledge of Allegiance at 7:02 p.m.

**II. DISCUSSION and POSSIBLE ACTION**

A. Budget Presentation

Mr. Wilson thanked the Administrative team that came together several times to discuss how the budget could be lowered. They met two times to put forth a budget reduction sheet and acknowledged that it was hard work. The budget being presented tonight is the lowest we can go. Ms. Holmes reviewed the reductions that are being proposed after the meetings with the administrators. Mr. Strumello was reminded of something that was said to him; that we need to work for the whole district not just for one school. He acknowledged that it was not a fun job. He congratulated the administrators on their hard work. He expressed one concern regarding the elimination of the nurse floater that he feels we need. Ms. Harmeling asked about the math and reading resources and wondered why they could not be covered in the textbook line item. Ms. Tencza explained that there was some money in the textbook line item but it was a small amount. We are in the position where we need to replace the math program because the digital license has expired and the textbooks are out of date. Teachers started a pilot program but it was interrupted by the pandemic. It has now been restarted. The guided reading materials were an investment in the classroom libraries. Each classroom has a reading library that allows them to teach to where they are. Mr. Olechna pointed out that we have some students who did not end last year where they might have been. Therefore, they started behind this year. He said the

teachers are competing for the same books. There is a larger group of kids at the mid-level. He said the situation would probably get worse before it gets better and the resources are needed. Ms. Nesteriak asked about the permanent building substitutes and the nurse floater and wondered where the increase will be seen in the budget. Ms. Holmes said the increases would be in the certified staff substitute line item. She said without the nurse floater, we would have to use an agency that will be more costly. Ms. Harmeling said the year to date in 119 has not been spent much due to the grant payments. She asked since all substitutes being paid through the grant so what is the assessment of where we will be at year-end. She wondered if we could move the remaining money around and purchase the resources from this year's budget. Ms. Holmes said we will have to see where we are but we could transfer money if the Board chooses to. Mr. Kubik asked about paying for substitutes. Ms. Holmes said we pay our substitutes \$115 a day. Mr. Kubik said so cutting permanent building subs would reflect savings in benefits only. Mr. Stanek asked if we have substitute nurses and Ms. Holmes said we get them from an agency. Mr. Stanek asked if we get the same substitutes from the agency so they have a familiarity with our schools. Ms. Holmes said we do not, we get who we get. Ms. Harmeling asked how many days we used a nurse agency and Ms. Holmes said she would need to check. Ms. Harmeling asked if no Capstone stipend was available, would the program be eliminated. Mr. Freund said since the onset of the program was put off due to the pandemic this year we might be able to do an appendix e stipend. Ms. Bruno said she was in support the purchase of the guided reading materials. Ms. Nesteriak asked what we could bring forward from the 20-21 budget. Mr. Wilson said we would look at this at year-end and would bring it to the Board. These are unknown variables, we think there may be money but we do not know at this point. Ms. Nesteriak said we should take a harder look at the forecast. She also asked if we have received any information regarding the forth-coming grants. Ms. Holmes confirmed that we have not yet received any information. Ms. Bruno asked for the cost of the .4 ELA. Ms. Holmes said it was \$21,000. With regard to Ms. Nesteriak's question, Ms. Holmes explained that the forecast is done in February/March because by then we have the information on the ECS payment, transportation, and tuition that gives us a better idea of how year-end will look. Mr. Champagne asked if the nine items were the only changes made in the budget. Ms. Holmes explained there are the nine items that were put into the 21-22 budget. Mr. Champagne asked if not having a library media specialist at the high school got us a demerit from NEASC. Ms. Tencza said the position was eliminated several years ago. NEASC criteria includes a Library Media Specialist but they cannot make you have one. Without a Library Media Specialist, we will continue to get a warning from NEASC. Mr. Freund said he is working on the NEASC five-year report. He said in 2016 the report came back without a warning. In 2017, we had a part time Library Media Specialist and NEASC recommended we bring back a full time Library Media Specialist. When the part time position was cut, we were put on the warning status. Mr. Strumello asked about any savings that might be realized due to the cutback of winter sports. Ms. Holmes said this will be part of the projection and they will look to see if any savings can be realized. She plans on working with Mr. DiStasi. She said she expected some savings but not a huge amount. Mr. Strumello encouraged Mr. DiStasi to have a discussion with officials regarding a freeze of their salaries. Mr. DiStasi said officials have lost their jobs and incomes due to cancellations, shorted seasons, and the cutting of middle school sports. He said as far as he knows, there have not been discussions with the officials. Ms. Harmeling asked if we could forecast some accounts especially those where a large amount of money has been unused such as bus fuel and substitutes. She strongly feels any hard purchases such as the learning resources could be made this year. Mr. Champagne asked if the fall coaches were paid. Ms. Holmes said they were paid 1/3 of their stipend. The winter coaches were also paid. Mr. Champagne said there should be excess in this line item and it is important to know what will be done with the money. Ms. Holmes said this would be included in the projection that she puts together in February. She also reminded the Board that the cafeteria group is not getting their payments and are struggling. We may have to help. Mr. Garofolo asked if advisors were paid and Ms. Holmes confirmed they were paid. Mr. Garofolo was concerned that they received free money. He asked if there is a contractual obligation to pay them whether or not things have happened. Mr. Wilson explained the advisors for clubs and activities have been doing things virtually in an effort to support our kids. Mr.

Garofolo said he stands corrected. Ms. Bruno asked what the increased music teacher would mean to the students. Mr. Freund said Mr. DeMarco who is retiring, covered psychology and social studies classes. The music teacher has a cross certification in social studies. In the first proposal making the music teacher full time would mean all the classes could be covered. In this proposal, a .8 teacher will only be able to cover four classes. Ms. Bruno said so we are covering 80% of the retired teacher, resulting in a reduction. Ms. Harmeling asked Ms. Holmes where we are in the cafeteria line item. Ms. Holmes said we had to carry some shortened staff, while others collected unemployment. She said the total is \$200,000 as of now but Ms. Brooks is trying to pay it down. Ms. Holmes said she hoped the second grant might help her situation. Ms. Nesteriak asked if there are needs for the students that we have not discussed. Mr. Wilson said this is a great unknown. In a normal year, we have met the needs of the students. At 2.55% we think we can reintroduce the kids and reconnect them academically and social emotionally. Teachers will continue to work together. We will continually monitor. He said it is hard to put a quantifier on it. We can work with this budget, which is why we brought it forward. Mr. Hatfield said he had to get on his soapbox wondering why the cafeteria is surprised by their shortfall. Everyone got free lunch so it should have been anticipated. Ms. Holmes said revenues are coming in and she is applying for grants. She is paying down what she can. She has reported a deficit of \$230,000 and Ms. Holmes is working with her. Mr. Strumello said we should also reach out to our legislators saying they need to advocate for our schools. Ms. Holmes said we are not the only district experiencing hardship. Our program has always been self-sufficient. She is hoping some Cares Act money can be used for the cafeteria. Ms. Holmes stated again that we knew this was happening and she is working with Ms. Brooks. She said we would work it out. Ms. Bruno said our nurses are our first responders and they care of not only students but also our staff. They will take care of people after the pandemic has passed. It is a shame to cut the nurse floater position. Mr. Strumello said he agrees 150%. Mr. Stanek said he feels we should add the nurse floater back into the budget. He suggested it be included in the motion when it is made. Ms. Harmeling said it is not that we do not value these positions, and what we cut we may see next year. Mr. Stanek repeated his request that the nurse floater be put back into the budget. Mr. Hatfield welcomed Ms. Drugonis and gave her the opportunity to offer some feedback. Ms. Drugonis said she commends the Board of Education on the good job to get their budget to 2.5%. She said she knows that the Board of Education will do what is right. Ms. Bruno said if we are adding the nurse floater into the budget, we should make a corresponding cut in the substitute nurses line item. Ms. Holmes said we cannot do this and she is not sure where a corresponding cut could be made. Ms. Harmeling agreed, she said maybe we could cut two lines such as certified staff and custodial services. Ms. Holmes was uncertain about this and said she should look into it. Ms. Harmeling said doing this would send a signal that we want a nurse floater. Mr. Champagne asked about a job description for this position and Ms. Holmes said they have one but it has not yet been voted on. Ms. Bruno asked if we could cut unemployment. Ms. Holmes said unemployment is fluid and she is going to need the extra money. Ms. Strumello suggested we could move things around after the budget is set. Mr. Kubik suggested the administration should figure out where to find the money. Mr. Wilson said they could offer suggestions before the budget is sent to the Board of Finance. He reminded the Board that we will see savings from the Johnson Controls project and we are anticipating savings.

**MOTION:** to adopt the presented superintendent's budget with the following changes: hold to a 2.55% increase, as presented in the working document presented at the January 25, 2021 Board of Education meeting, that includes the addition of a full time nurse floater with benefits. Further, move that the administration forward an amended document to the Board prior to submission to the town.

**SO VOTED**

**AFFIRMATIVE:** Ms. Bruno, Mr. Champagne, Mr. Garofolo, Ms. Harmeling, Mr. Hatfield, Mr. Kubik, Ms. Nesteriak, Mr. Stanek, Mr. Strumello

**MOTION PASSES: 9-0**

Ms. Holmes presented two dates February 3 and February 8, as the dates to present to the Board of Finance. Mr. Hatfield, Ms. Harmeling, and Mr. Strumello agreed on February 8, 2021.

B. Zoom Meeting Design

Mr. Champagne wanted to discuss some possible features in Zoom that might help us with visuals and public comments. Mr. Dyer gave some background regarding Zoom. When the pandemic occurred, Zoom gave educational institutions a free license. Many features are not included in the free version and we cannot even look at them. Students and teachers use Google Meet. We would have to purchase Zoom Pro and he was unsure of the number of participants that could participate in one meeting. He thought the Pro version was limited to 100 participants and he knows of some meetings that had up to 200 participants. Mr. Dyer has reviewed packages and costs. The costs are a consideration along with meeting management. He said his experience is it is hectic when people are joining and sometimes the names do not always match. He said he thought the Pro version might help with public comment. Mr. Champagne said he would like to see a solution for live public comments and he felt it was important for the Board of Education to get their faces out there. Ms. Harmeling said she would like to see video at the February 1 meeting and suggested a form be made for public comments. She said we should shoot for the March meeting for this. Ms. Bruno asked about a limit for the number of words in a public comment and Mr. Strumello confirmed it was 300. Mr. Dyer asked about who would do the moderation saying IT can do it but it does get rather hectic behind the scenes. Ms. Harmeling said she felt that it should not be IT to moderate. She feels it should be the Board of Education. Mr. Champagne asked if there could be two hosts and Mr. Dyer said there could be a co-host. He suggested a test run in March. Mr. Strumello said he felt it should not be the Chair. Mr. Hatfield said in Town the moderators are Rory Burke and Mila McCool for the Town and Kyle Kelley for the Police and Ms. Drugonis confirmed this.

III. **ADJOURNMENT**

**MOTION:** (Mr. Champagne/sec., Ms. Harmeling) to adjourn

**SO VOTED**

**AFFIRMATIVE:** Ms. Bruno, Mr. Champagne, Mr. Garofolo, Ms. Harmeling, Mr. Hatfield, Ms. Nesteriak, Mr. Stanek, Mr. Strumello

**DID NOT VOTE:** Mr. Kubik

**MOTION PASSES:** 8-0

The meeting adjourned at 8:52 pm.

Submitted by:  
Lee-Ann Dauerty  
Board Clerk

Use the link below to access a listen only link to this meeting:

<https://youtu.be/XYFYMXcDej0>