

**Portland Board of Education  
Special Meeting  
Tuesday, January 23, 2024 @ 7:00 pm**

**1. Call to Order and Roll Call**

Laurel Steinhauser, Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm

BOE Members Present: Laurel Steinhauser, Meg Scata, Kim Nagy-Maruschock, Sarah Spear, Dave Murphy, Stacy Benham; via zoom Tim Lavoy

Members Absent: none

Administration Present: Superintendent Dr. Charles Britton, Stephanie Fragola Assistant to Superintendent for Business and Financial Affairs, Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Technology Eric Martin, Director of Student Services Dawn Davis, Director of Facilities Bob Shea, Administrators Jessica Bruenn, Ryan Walstrom, Michael Searson, Chuck Hershon, Kate Lawson, and Frank Cardona

Student Representative: Caitlin Walsh, Liam Rowe

**2. Pledge of Allegiance**

**3. Approval of Agenda**

**M. Scata moved to approve the agenda, seconded by S. Benham. Unanimously approved. MOTION CARRIED.**

**4. Approval of Consent Agenda**

- A. Approval of January 2, 2024 Board of Education Regular Meeting Minutes
- B. Approval of January 9, 2024 Board of Education Budget Meeting Minutes
- C. Approval of January 11, 2024 Board of Education Budget Meeting Minutes
- D. Approval of January 17, 2024 Board of Education/Board of Selectmen Joint Meeting Minutes
- E. Accept Donation from Grynn & Barrett Enterprises to Gildersleeve Elementary School, \$1,102.45
- F. Accept Donation from Art Rich Photography to Portland High School, \$367.30
- G. Approval of Out-of-State Field Trip PMS Band/Chorus to Six Flags, MA, May 31, 2024

**M. Scata moved to approve the consent agenda, seconded by K. Nagy-Maruschock. Unanimously approved. MOTION CARRIED**

**5. Audience of Citizens**

Erin Levinsperger, Middle Haddam Rd – Supports budget increase of 5% or larger. Stated her understanding that we need to be fiscally responsible but not at the expense of students education.

Liz Hibino, Scenic Dr – Stated proposed cuts are disheartening. Supports a 5% or more increase. Asked the Board not to cut anything further from the budget.

Darcy Parmalee, Foley Rd – Supports increase of 5%. Stated her concern about sharing a librarian and any special education services being impacted.

Samantha Labonte, Cedar Terrace – Asked the Board to consider moving forward with a budget that maintains what we currently have in place. Asked the Board to evaluate the insurance plan.

Alisha Strong, Gospel Lane – Stated her concern about proposed cuts. Her concern is that these cuts will negatively impact our kids.

Parker Strong, Gospel Lane – Feels the cuts were quickly made and that the Board should have waited for the town to vote on the budget as is. Stated other districts in CT are at a higher increase.

**6. Portland Public Schools Spotlight – none**

**7. Student Representative Report –** Liam reported the HS musical rehearsals for Matilda is in full swing. The play date is 3/22/24. Clubs are also going strong. Caitlin reported winter sports are in the second half of the season. Senior nights are happening. Second semester starts tomorrow.

**8. Communications and Updates**

A. Superintendent's Report – Dr. Britton reported there will be a special board meeting on Thursday 1/25/24 at 5:30 pm to discuss the budget. The approved budget is due to the town per town charter on 1/31/24. The Great Blue presentation and report from the joint meeting with the BOS is posted on our website. On 2/1/24 Mike Sorano from Friar will be conducting a walk-through of Valley View to assess the facility and begin putting together some figures and ideas for us. Received letters regarding the budget, submitted are letters from Meredith Gelineau and Sarah McLaughlin. Due to receiving letters after Board packet submittal, letters from Melissa Kelley, Alicia Holloway and Annabelle Maruschock were read into the record.

B. Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Technology – Eric Martin report submitted. He provided more detail on the K-3 literacy program. Portland applied for a financial extension to 2025. We continue to use a combination of approaches to achieve what is required. We still have time to explore a variety of options.

**9. New Business (Discussion/Possible Action)**

A. Accept Donation of a Buddy Bench from the Community Foundation to Valley View Elementary School – There is currently a buddy bench at Valley View that is in need of repair/replacement. This donation will replace the existing one.

**S. Spear moved to accept the donation of a Buddy Bench from The Community Foundation to Valley View, seconded by K. Nagy-Maruschock. Unanimously approved. MOTION CARRIED.**

B. Accept Donation from Andover Schools for a Compressor to be Installed at Valley View – There are two compressors, one failed. The contractor working at the school was aware that Andover had an extra compressor they did not need. The superintendent of Andover graciously said we could have the compressor as a donation. This saved us quite a bit of money.

**M. Scata moved to accept the donation of a compressor from Andover Schools, seconded by T. Lavoy. Unanimously approved. MOTION CARRIED.**

C. Approve Project Oceanology 2024-2025 Interdistrict Grant Program Application – Brownstone has been participating in Project Oceanology for about 6 years.

**M. Scata moved to approve the participation in Project Oceanology for 2024-2025, seconded by S. Spear. Unanimously approved. MOTION CARRIED.**

- D. Board of Education Policies (1<sup>st</sup> reading)
1. Policy 9323 - Bylaws of the Board, Construction of the Agenda – Policy has been reviewed and vetted by the Policy subcommittee. Dr. Britton explained the changes to the policy. The only change of note is the timeframe that Board members should give to request the inclusion of agenda items desired. The change is from 24 hours to 5 days. NO ACTION
  2. Policy 4117.6 - Personnel -Certified, Exit Survey/Interviews – Policy has been reviewed and vetted by the Policy subcommittee. The changes are a reflection of state statute requirements. The Board is obligated to adopt a policy to have exit interviews. The exit interviews will be shared with the state, along with the Personnel subcommittee. NO ACTION

**10. Old Business (Discussion/Possible Action)**

- A. Board of Education Policies (2<sup>nd</sup> reading)
1. Policy 5112 – Ages of Attendance

**K. Nagy-Maruschock moved to approve Policy 5112 Ages of Attendance as presented, seconded by T. Lavoy. Unanimously approved. MOTION CARRIED.**

2. Policy 1330 – Building Usage Request Forms 1-4 only

**M. Scata moved to approve Policy 1330 Building Usage Request Forms as presented, seconded by T. Lavoy. Unanimously approved. MOTION CARRIED.**

B. Approve 2024-2025 Superintendent of Schools Proposed Budget

Dr. Britton stated the insurance rate came back higher than slated. The increase is 12.7%. There were five bids reviewed, this was significantly the best. The state plan came in the highest. This increases the budget by \$87k. The list presented for the 3.5% increase does not include the increase in insurance cost. The list presented, with the insurance cost brings it to 3.7%. Dr. Britton is trying to find a balance for what the community can support and what we need to move forward to continue with quality education. Pay to play discussed. There is \$43,000 revenue projected as a placeholder. This revenue placeholder maintains the 4.87% increase. Board members asked to look at secretaries and administrators as potential cuts, as they do not feel they can cut any more staff that work directly with students. Also discussed option of closing a school this year. Dr. Britton stated approximately \$850,000 would be saved in closing a school. We are overstaffed due to the fact that we have three elementary schools, but because of this we are spread thin. He gave an overview of what it would look like to close a school immediately. He also stated the disruption if this was done now would be very upsetting to parents, students and faculty. Dr. Britton gave a list of issues cutting an administrator without closing a school would cause. Transportation costs discussed and how much we could save if M&J can provide a person all day for mid-day runs. Previous Covid funding discussed. Discussion on 2.5 FTE cuts. Discussed option of 1)saving the library media specialist position 2)maintain the 4.85% by looking to decrease a secretary, keeping pay to play, and applying special education savings. Tim gave his thoughts that the Board should let the superintendent decide on what FTE positions are most needed, instead of picking favorites of what the Board wants to save. Adding 2.5 FTE back in would increase the budget to a 5.58% increase \$170,777.50. At Thursday's meeting the

Board would like to see what a 5.58% increase would look like, along with a 4.85% increase with bringing back the library position and utilizing pay to play revenue. NO ACTION

#### **11. Committee Reports**

- A. Curriculum – L. Steinhauser – discussed graduation requirement changes
- B. Policy – M. Scata – 2/14/24 next meeting
- C. Personnel – L. Steinhauser – no report
- D. Buildings and Grounds – K. Nagy-Maruschock – no report
- E. Liaison
  - 1. CREC – M. Scata – audit complete, new superintendent starting.
  - 2. Selectmen – D. Murphy – no report
  - 3. Committee on Solidarity – Vacant – no report
  - 4. Equity and Inclusion Coalition – T. Lavoy/S. Spear – no report
  - 5. Youth Services Advisory Board – T. Lavoy – no report

#### **12. Audience of Citizens**

Alicia Strong, Gospel Lane – Asked for more information to be able to get the word out. Also thinks the Board should go forward with the larger increase and let the Board of Selectmen turn the budget increase down, and then the parents can address the BOS.

Jessica Rosenthal, Edwards Rd – feels confident in the Board moving in the direction they are moving towards.

Alicia Holloway, Foley Rd – Community members need to get the word out and support the increase.

Gerald Baccori (sp?), Main St – Supports the increase, also agrees to have the BOS be the ones to decrease.

#### **13. Board of Education Member Comments**

S. Spear – appreciates everyone who spoke during citizens comments

K. Nagy-Maruschock – thanks to all who have been supportive

L. Steinhauser – CABE webinar on 1/24/24 at 11a. Area 8 legislative breakfast 1/25/24 at 9a.

#### **14. Executive Session – none**

#### **15. Executive Session Action - none**

#### **16. Adjournment**

**K. Nagy-Maruschock moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:10 pm, seconded by S. Spear. Unanimously approved. MOTION CARRIED.**

Respectfully Submitted,  
Tricia Dean  
Executive Assistant to the Superintendent/Board Clerk